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THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE
IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
EDITED BY JAMES LEWIS MAY
AND BERNARD MIALL • • •

THE BLOOM OF LIFE



THE BLOOM OF LIFE

BY ANATOLE FRANCE



TRANSLATED BY
J. LEWIS MAY

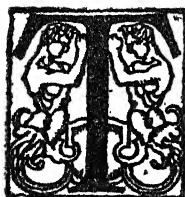


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PREFACE



THIS book is a sequel to *Little Pierre*,¹ which appeared two years ago, and it brings my friend to the eve of his entry into the big world. These two volumes, whereto may be added *My Friend's Book* and *Pierre Nozière*, recount—although some names are altered and some circumstances feigned—the memories of my early years.

How and why I came to employ disguise in presenting these faithful reminiscences to the world I shall unfold at the end of my narrative, when the child that I once had been had grown so complete a stranger to me that I could find, in his company, distraction from my own. My recollections follow one another haphazard, without order or connection. My memory is capricious. Madame de Caylus, when old and weighed down with care, lamented that her mind was not sufficiently free to allow her to dictate her autobiography. "Well," said her son, ready and willing to take up the pen for her, "we will call the book just 'Memories,' and you need not be bound down to any order of dates or any

¹ See Epilogue.

logical sequence of events." Alas, those who peruse the Memories of Little Pierre will not encounter Racine therein, nor Saint-Cyr, nor the Court of Louis XIV; nor will they discover the good style of Madame de Maintenon's niece; for the French language, so pure in her day, has greatly deteriorated since. Nevertheless, it is best to speak the speech of our fellows. The following pages are filled with little things portayed with great exactitude, and I am assured that, for all their slighness, these trifles, emanating from a true heart, may yet have power to please.

ANATOLE FRANCE

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THE BLOOM OF LIFE

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CHAPTER I

PEOPLE DO NOT GIVE AWAY ENOUGH



THAT day, Fontanet and I, who were both in the Second Form under M. Brard, had, in accordance with custom, left the college on the stroke of half-past four. We were going down the Rue Cherche-Midi followed by Madame Tourtour, a retainer of Fontanet's family, and by Justine, whom my father had nicknamed The Catastrophe, because, wherever she happened to be, she was constantly letting loose the demons of Fire, Earth, and Water, and because whatever she might be holding in her hands would suddenly escape her and fly off in the most unexpected directions. We were proceeding towards our respective parental domiciles, and our ways lay together for a considerable distance. Fontanet lived at the bottom of the Rue des Saints-Pères. It was a December evening and already dark. The pavements were wet and the street lamps glimmered in a brownish haze. The route was enlivened with the

countless, varied noises of the city, which were continually punctuated by shrill shrieks or peals of laughter from Justine, whose flowing woollen scarf and voluminous apron pockets were always getting entangled with the passers-by.

"People do not give away enough," I suddenly remarked to Fontanet.

I expressed this thought in a tone of sincere conviction and as the outcome of mature reflection. I deemed that I was drawing forth this jewel of a truth from the depths of my consciousness and, as such, I imparted it to Fontanet. It is, however, more probable that I was repeating a phrase that I had heard or read somewhere or other. I was prone, in those days, to adopt as my own the ideas of other people. I have since corrected that proclivity, and I am now aware how much I am beholden to my fellows, to the ancients as well as the moderns, to my own countrymen and to men of other lands and particularly to the Greeks, to whom I owe so much and to whom I would fain owe more, for whatsoever of sound knowledge we possess concerning man and the universe is from them. But this is a digression.

Hearing me enunciate this proposition, namely, that people do not give away enough, Fontanet, who was very little for his age, glanced up at me furtively with his sharp fox-like face and darted an inquiring look at me. Fontanet was always ready to examine any idea that presented itself, in case there was any-

thing to be got out of it. In the present instance the advantage was not apparent. He therefore awaited further enlightenment.

I observed again with increased gravity, "People do not give away enough," and I proceeded to explain:

"They are not sufficiently liberal in almsgiving. They are wrong: for every one should give to the poor what he does not want for himself."

"It's possible," replied Fontanet, after reflecting a moment or two.

This utterance, brief as it was, encouraged me, and I proposed to my beloved condisciple that we two together should form a charitable association. I knew his enterprising character, his quick, inventive brain, and I was confident that, between us, we should do big things.

After a short discussion we arrived at a working agreement.

"How much money have you, to give to the poor?" asked Fontanet.

I replied that I had two shillings and a halfpenny to give to the fund, and that if Fontanet would contribute a like sum we could put our charitable work into operation at once.

Now it befell that Fontanet, who was the only child of a very rich widow, and had a pony all ready saddled given him for a New Year's present, could, for the moment, produce no more than fourpence. But, as he justly pointed out, it was not necessary

that we should both pay in the same amount at the outset. He would give more later on.

On thinking it over, I perceived that the great drawback about our undertaking was its very facility. It was only too easy to hand over two and fourpence halfpenny to the first blind beggar we might come across. And, for my part, I was not disposed to consider myself adequately repaid for my generosity by a mere look from the blind man's dog sitting patiently on its posterior with its bowl round its neck. I wanted a different sort of return for my largesse. When I was twelve I was something of a Pharisee. I crave to be forgiven. I have made amends since—only too thoroughly.

Having left Fontanet at his door, I hung on to Justine's arm, for I loved her, and, full of philanthropic projects, I said:

"Do you think people give enough—you? Tell me."

From her silence I perceived that she had not taken in what I said, and I was not surprised. She never really listened to my observations and seldom understood them. With that exception we used to hit it off famously. I proceeded to explain:

"Justine," I cried, shaking her fat red arms as hard as I could, to hold her fleeting attention, "do you think that people give enough to the poor? Because I don't."

"Beggars always get too much given them," she answered. "They're a lazy lot; but there are the de-

serving poor, and we ought to be sorry for them. They are about everywhere. They keep out of the way though, and they will suffer in silence rather than beg assistance."

I understood. My mind was made up. In company with Fontanet, I would henceforth devote myself to seeking out the deserving poor.

That very evening, by an unexpected stroke of fortune, my grandfather, who was both poor and generous, gave me a five-shilling piece. Next day, when we were in M. Brard's class, I gave Fontanet to understand by pantomimic gestures that our funds for the relief of the deserving poor amounted to a total of seven shillings and fourpence halfpenny.

M. Brard, observing my antics, said I was playing the fool and gave me a bad mark. Oh, the bitter smile that played about my lips, and the disdain with which I contemplated that inept preceptor of mine, as he put down my bad mark in a register already black with the record of my misdemeanours! For why conceal the fact? In M. Brard's estimation my faults were legion.

When the midday break came, Fontanet snapped his fingers to show how pleased he was, and imbued me with the notion that, some day or other, his aunt, who was very rich, would give two or three times as much as my contribution, and that, in the meantime, I ought to entrust the seven shillings and fourpence halfpenny to his keeping. This transfer,

according to him, was necessary for the proper administration of the Fund's accounts.

And we resolved that that same evening, as soon as we were out of school, we would look for one of the deserving poor. The circumstances were favourable to the prosecution of our task. La Tourtour, who had a cold on the chest, was confined to her room, and Justine, my Justine, had, single-handed, the task of convoying Fontanet and myself to our respective abodes. And Justine, whose scarlet cheeks appeared to be on the point of bursting—Justine who had to strive amain to grapple with the catastrophes that were perpetually descending upon her, seemed to us incapable of exercising control and devoid of all authority. Nevertheless, even with all this in our favour, it was a task that taxed our resources to the uttermost to discover, amid all the multitude of burgesses, one of those meritorious poor folk whose distinguishing characteristic it is to bear their ills in silence. Howbeit, we deemed we had clapped hands on one of them. Clad in a sordid old frock coat he was dragging himself along with a painful limp. We were all eyes as we stared at him.

"That's one of them," I whispered in Fontanet's ear.

"Bound to be," he answered.

But at the corner of the Rue Varin the man turned into a tavern adorned with painted railings and a vine branch in wrought iron. We beheld him clutch

and gulp down a glass of wine on the zinc counter that gleamed and glinted in the garish light.

"I believe," said I, "that he's a drunkard."

"Good Lord, anyone can see that," replied Fontanet, who made me admire his perspicacity.

We were not going to be disheartened by just one setback. We persevered with our search, accompanied by Justine, who puffed and panted as she laboured after us in the countless tortuosities of our mysterious chase. Arriving at the Carrefour de la Croix Rouge, we espied a young peasant girl who, with her basket on her arm, seemed to be spelling out the names over the shops and appeared in great trouble. I thought that, in her, we had discovered the object of our quest. I went up to her very politely and said, as I took off my hat:

"Can I be of service to you in any way?" Her only answer was a look of angry annoyance. I again offered my services. Clearly the people of her village had rather over-emphasized their warning of the dangers that beset young girls in Paris, and had given her an exaggerated idea of the precocity of vice in the big towns. I was fairly tall for my age, but I did not look so very redoubtable. Apparently fear threw her visual organs into such confusion that she endowed me with a full-grown moustache.

"Take that, impudence," said she, giving me a box on the ears.

For the moment my innocence prevented me from realizing the flattering implication of this assault.

Fontanet, who had been an interested spectator of the scene, emitted a joyous chuckle. Justine intervened. She called the peasant wench a beast, and threatened to give her a hiding. Then she turned her attention to me.

"That'll learn you, Master Pierre, to interfere with the girls. You are a very bad-behaved, good-for-nothing boy."

"The thing would never have happened," said Fontanet, "if you had let me speak to the girl. But you always want to do everything yourself and won't take anyone's advice."

The reproach was unmerited, as I appeal to all who know about me to bear witness.

We arrived at the conclusion that the search for a member of the deserving poor was a difficult, arduous, and hazardous undertaking. We were just coming to the Rue des Saints-Pères, and there was no time to be lost. We found ourselves following in the wake of a man who was evidently in misfortune. He was bowed down with care. His trousers were baggy at the knees. His hat was filthy, and he had a nose that came right down to his mouth. In short, everything about him announced the meritorious pauper. We were on the point of accosting him when Fontanet suddenly clutched me by the arm.

"Look out!" he exclaimed. "He's got a decoration."

And sure enough he had a piece of red ribbon stitched on to his buttonhole. Whereby we recog-

nized that, so far from being a pauper, the gentleman was to be counted amongst the most important members of society. That estimate was perhaps excessive, but we had been trained in an atmosphere where honours were held in high respect.

A few paces farther on, Fontanet, who was still on the lookout, shouted "Look, look, there he is!" pointing to a shabbily attired old man who, as he walked along, kept fumbling in his pocket and seemingly failed to find what he was seeking, for he continued to fumble. What was he looking for? Money, tobacco? Impossible to say, but for Fontanet it was a sure sign, an infallible indication, of the deserving poor. Unable to make up his mind to beg, he continued to search his pockets for what was no longer to be found in them.

"Speak to him," said Fontanet.

"Speak to him yourself," I replied. "You told me just now I didn't know how to express myself. Besides, you've got the money, so you ought to do the offering of it."

This argument convinced Fontanet who, leaping in front of the man who was groping in his pockets, stopped him on the narrow pavement and, raising his cap, said:

"Monsieur——"

After this exordium, Fontanet, though he was naturally bold and even brazen, remained dumb. The old man, when we were close to him, looked prosperous. You could see that he had a gold pin

and a gold seal. I went to Fontanet's assistance, and pulling off my cap too, I said in courteous but somewhat quavering tones:

"Monsieur——" and there my courage failed me and I could go no further.

Seeing our confusion, the man called us his little friends, and inquired what he could do to help us.

Now Fontanet had a mind extraordinarily rich in resource.

"Monsieur," said he in tones of assumed politeness, "will you kindly tell us the way to the Rue de Tournon?"

"The Rue de Tournon—you are coming away from it, my little friends. Take the first on the left, the second to the left again, then the third——"

He hesitated, and every time he gave us a direction he would fumble in the fob of his waistcoat as if he thought to discover there some indication that would help him to solve the difficulties of the itinerary. Fontanet was looking at him with an expression of mock seriousness on his sharp, foxy little face. I was biting my lips. Suddenly I exploded with laughter, my comrade did the same, and we both took to our heels as fast as we could, not however so quickly as not to hear the astonished old man call us a pair of rogues and vagabonds.

Justine, in ignorance of the cause of our headlong flight, and fearing to lose sight of us, perhaps for ever, already wondering, too, how she would dare to show herself to my mother without me, set off

at full speed down the dark, crowded street, regardless of everything, animate or inanimate, that came in her way, at length falling flat down in front of a hand-cart.

She came up with us alongside the barrow of the man from Auvergne¹ at the corner of the Rue de l'Université. Fontanet was buying a pennyworth of chestnuts out of the funds of the deserving poor. Justine upbraided us for our conduct. We offered her a chestnut. The flesh is weak; she munched it, grumbling a little the while.

We arrived home late and dishevelled, Justine indecently plastered with mud.

"What a state you're in, girl!" said my mother.

Justine hurried off to the kitchen, and to make up for lost time she emptied a scuttleful of coal on the fire. She was crying. The glow from the grate lit up her countenance and made ruddy her tears, even as those which, when Troy was in flames, were shed by Priam's daughter, too well beloved of Apollo:

Ad cælum tendens ardentia lumina frustra.

I was beginning to despair of finding my specimen of the deserving poor. But a few days later on, Fontanet, during midday recreation, told La Chesnais all about our projects and our mishaps, throwing with most admirable skill whatever was ridiculous about our adventure upon me. He asked La

¹ *My Friends' Book*, page 159.

Chesnais whether he knew of a deserving person in straitened circumstances, of any poor man who did not beg. La Chesnais was held by us in the highest esteem.

He replied that his mother used to render assistance to a poor body of this kind.

"He is dead now," he went on, "but he left a widow and two children. Mother gives them my old clothes. The Widow Bargouiller," added La Chesnais, "lives in the Passage du Dragon." And he mentioned the number, which I have forgotten. We made up our minds, Fontanet and I, that we would convey to the Widow Bargouiller the sum set aside for the relief of concealed misfortune, or at least what was left of it, for at Fontanet's instigation I drew upon it daily for the purchase of cakes and bars of chocolate. Fontanet encouraged me the more freely to concur in this expenditure, for he assured me that he himself would shortly be contributing enormous sums to the common fund.

Wednesday being a holiday, my mother let me go out in the afternoon alone with Fontanet, in whom she reposed complete confidence. In one respect, she was quite right. Fontanet never committed any follies himself; but he was always eager to perpetrate them by proxy. My mother could never see through Fontanet. He always appeared to advantage in her company, and regularly displayed just that measure of hypocrisy requisite to secure the good opinion of the world. We took

advantage of the confidence we thus enjoyed to go and call upon the Widow Bargouiller. The Rue de Rennes did not exist at this date, and to gain access to Dragon Court you had to go down a narrow alley and pass under an arch above which a fearsome dragon writhed and twisted. It is a very excellent example of the ornamentation of the Louis XV period, and is still in existence. They have painted it green now. It would have been better to leave it stone grey. In the far-off days of which I speak it was coloured a bright red, which increased the horror of its aspect. And one got the impression that a terrible roaring noise was proceeding from its fiery throat, for, as you approached it, your ears were assailed by an uproar compared with which the noise of the fulling-mills, which so daunted the courage of Sancho Panza, were but a dulcet murmur. This ear-splitting din was, if the truth must be known, produced by hundreds of hammers smiting simultaneously on iron, and this alley, the abode of the Cyclops, bristled with pointed railings painted red like the dragon over the arch. Our way lay through this region of reverberating metal, and the adventure seemed to hold out some promise of wonders in store. At last, nearly at the end of the alley, at the number La Chesnais had told us, we pushed open a door and passed onwards into a region of darkness and gloom. The air we breathed was close and musty, we stumbled against old casks, ladders, and mouldering planks. The din of innumerable

hammers, which had deafened us awhile ago, now stole upon our ears with a dull and muffled sound, and we took heart again. After a moment or two, our eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, we made out a spiral staircase mighty steep, down which hung a thick greasy rope to hold on by. After groping our way up a score or so of steps, our hands encountered a door. As it was not provided with a bell, I essayed a little scratching noise. Fontanet gave a loudish tap.

"Who's that?" asked a gruff voice within.

"Us."

"What do you want?"

"Madame Bargouiller."

Some one came slowly along the passage, the key grated in the lock, the door opened and lo! Madame Bargouiller stood before us, flushed, bloated, her head crowned with vipers, her breasts threatening to escape from her flowered camisole. The room had a stone floor, and served both for bedroom and kitchen. A big bed, a little one, a wooden dresser, a few cane-bottomed chairs made up the furniture. One of the chairs had only three legs. Kitchen utensils and sacred pictures hung upon the walls. Bottles and dirty glasses adorned the chimney-piece.

The widow asked us in softened tones what our wishes were.

"You are poor, are you not, Madame?" inquired Fontanet.

"I am, worse luck," said the widow with a sigh.

She made us sit down. Fontanet, though smaller than I, appeared to her the more important of the two, for she gave him a seat in an easy chair containing some cushions full of holes, whereas to me she held out the veteran with only three legs. With much moaning she told us of her misfortunes. They arose from her having been left a widow. Her husband had occupied a position of trust at Bercy; but he had died after a long illness, and all their things had been sold up. She herself was a mattress-maker by trade, but she had lost all her customers. She was very voluble on the subject of her two children—Alice and Firmin—who were little darlings, but it was terribly difficult to keep them in food and clothes. Being out of work for the moment they had gone out to look for something to do.

With an easy charm which compelled my admiration, Fontanet bestowed on her the pecuniary relief, without specifying my share of the contribution, for he knew how modest I was. She called him *Monsieur le Vicomte*, and thanked him with tears in her eyes, praising God who had sent an angel to her assistance.

She inquired whether, by any chance, we had any old linen or old boots to give away, for she was sadly in need of these things. She asked us to give her all our left-off clothing, for she could always make use of them.

She inquired who it was that had sent us, and when she learnt that it was *Madame de La Chesnais'* son

who had given us her address, she made no comment, which somehow gave me the impression that she was not now on the best of terms with that benefactress.

She made close inquiries as to our names and the position of our parents, and kept asking us exactly where we lived, as if she wanted to learn our addresses by heart. We rose and took our leave.

When we reached the doorstep, she reminded us again of her need of clothes and linen, not only for herself but for Alice and Firmin. She gave us a most pressing invitation to come and see her again, promised to remember us in her prayers, and told us to mind we did not fall down the stairs, which were rather dark.

I emerged from this miserable tenement with heart untouched and without any feelings of compassion for the Widow Bargouiller. But Fontanet's countenance, on the other hand, was so profoundly eloquent of pious zeal, of the austere delight of doing good to others, of the fervour of a charitable heart, that, comparing myself with him, I felt a sensation of shame!

"We do not give enough!" sighed my friend. "Of what a pleasure we deprive ourselves!" and his little, pointed face was all aglow with holy joy.

These sentiments, this attitude, this air of profound concern impressed me, and I tried hard to imbue myself with sentiments as exalted as Fontanet's.

"What is this smell you've got about you, Pierre?" asked my mother.

Her keen olfactory sense generally enabled her to discover what company the beings whom she loved had been keeping when out of sight. But her confidence in Fontanet relieved her of all misgivings. She did not press for an answer.

Though I entertained no affection for the Widow Bargouiller, I nevertheless resolved to continue my benefactions. It was no easy matter. All I had been able to save in a whole week was twopence halfpenny, which was hardly enough to support a widow and her two children. Fontanet, as yet, had received nothing from his aunt. Tortured by a selfish desire to give, and remembering that the Widow Bargouiller had made an urgent request for old linen, I had a look at the cupboard in which my mother kept my shirts and drawers, and I was tempted to take some of them to satisfy my hunger for almsgiving. When revolving Time brought Wednesday round again the temptation became irresistible. I was under no illusions as to the right or wrong of this daring deed of mine. In those days my ideas on the subject of property were stricter than they are now. They were founded on tradition. I deemed that my body linen did not belong to me, since I had not paid for it. To-day the question appears less simple. My notions of the origin and nature of property are quite opposed to those held by the majority of my contemporaries. But

in those long past days of which I am writing, no one was less of a Proud'honian than I, or better able to distinguish between other folks' property and my own. Now according to my own views, in conformity with my own principles, and judging by my own moral code, I was not free to do as I liked with my clothes. My conscience forbade it unequivocally. I paid no heed to my conscience; I slipped into my room and hastily opened the wardrobe (it was, I remember, a little English wardrobe made of mahogany and very plain in style. I thought it hideous, but it must have been charming, though no one appeared to realize it in those days). Without stopping to choose, I pulled out, almost at random, a little bundle of clothes which I stowed under my great-coat, and stealthily slipped out, in company with Fontanet. To such as it may interest to know, I took with me, so far as my memory serves, two or three nightshirts, a woollen waistcoat, or probably it was a cotton one, half a dozen nightcaps, those truly hideous things they call plumed helmets, the emblematic headgear of the smug and comfortable bourgeois. Without question I chose my bundle hurriedly, but when I say I did so at random, 'tis a gloss on the truth. I had a loathing for those cotton nightcaps. To bestow mine on the poor gave me a twofold delight, and it was with a very well-defined intention that I included the largest possible number of them in my booty. Even now I should hold those cotton bonnets in peculiar detestation,

did I not remember that, according to the general tale, it was with one of them that Jeanneton crowned the little King of Yvetot. But that does not come into my story. Fontanet, who, but a week ago, had so admirably expressed the joys of almsgiving, now evinced no further interest in the Widow Bargouiller. He refused to accompany me to her abode. He had made up his mind to go and try his luck at a shooting gallery that had recently been set up on the Boulevard de l'Observatoire. I drew his attention to the fact that beneath my great-coat I had a collection of old linen intended for the two children of the penniless widow. He advised me to take the parcel home again, or better still, to throw it down a drain. The utmost he would grant me was that he would wait for me outside the Passage du Dragon by what time I, by giving raiment to the naked, accomplished one of the seven corporal works of mercy. I found Madame Bargouiller more red and fiery of visage than on the previous occasion, and the nest of vipers more restless on her head. She made inquiries for the little Vicomte, and when she learned that he was not coming, she seemed seriously put out.

"He is such a pet," she said. "Besides, anyone can see he's one of the nobs."

Alice and Firmin had again gone out to look for work. Their mother received with a gratitude, that did not seem exactly enthusiastic, the garments which I had brought for them. She urged me with prayers, nay even with threats, that I should say

nothing at home as to whom I had given the linen. She warned me that the direst misfortunes would overtake me if I revealed the secret. As I made no promises, she changed her tone, moaning and weeping, and calling God to witness what an unfortunate and virtuous woman she was. Then, pouring out a little red liquor into a glass, she invited me to drink.

"It's cherry brandy, my pet; it'll do you good."

I refused; she insisted. All the vipers that crowned her writhed and twisted on her head. Frightened out of my life I took the stuff and drank. She asked me whether I could give her a little money to pay the baker. I replied, in confusion, that I hadn't got any. In the words of the tragic poet, "I longed for a prompt retreat."

At the end of the alley I found Fontanet. Under the Red Dragon, amid the din of the hammers, he was finishing off a plum tart which he had just purchased from the pastrycook at the corner. He hardly listened to the account I gave him of my interview with the Widow Bargouiller. He stated that he disapproved of my conduct, and refused to listen to a word of the silly story. We went off pistol shooting. He convinced me that he was a good shot. But he only succeeded in doing so by the force of his eloquence, and contrary to the evidence of my senses.

I felt worried. As I mounted the parental stairs my misgivings continually increased. I took a serious view of my conduct, and was filled with the

not unreasonable apprehension that my misdeeds had been discovered. Justine opened the door to me. Her eyes were smarting with tears. Her scarlet cheeks looked ready to burst. She gazed at me in silence and in terror.

I found my mother very calm.

"You smell of brandy," said she. "Where do you come from? To whom have you given the linen you took away?"

"To a poor widow called Madame Bargouiller, who lives in the Cour du Dragon."

"I know her," said my mother as she turned to my father; "she's that mattress-maker who stole the wool from my mattresses, and has been turned away everywhere for drunkenness."

Mortified at having been taken in, I protested bitterly that she was an honest, God-fearing woman. I further remarked that Madame Bargouiller had two children to keep.

"No doubt," answered my father, "and they are much to be pitied. But tell me, Pierre, why didn't you consult your father and mother before going off almsgiving like this? There is no art so difficult as the art of bestowing alms, and I confess that this question of private charity troubles me not a little. It argues considerable rashness on your part, Pierre, to imagine that, at your age, alone and without advice, you could do a thing that requires a great deal of experience and reflection. My friend, Monsieur Amédéc Hennequin, is opposed to charity

whether public or private, and, withal, he is a warm-hearted man. He is a communist, and states it as his conviction that we shall never do any real good until we have a social revolution. I am tempted to believe that a social revolution would not suffice, and that what we need is a moral revolution——”

My mother interrupted this harangue, which, it was clear, she considered irrelevant and misplaced.

“Pierre,” she said, “why did you not ask me if you might take that linen? You did not ask me because you knew beforehand that I should say ‘No.’ That linen did not belong to you. The ideas of Monsieur Amédée Hennequin and Monsieur Proudhon have not yet come to pass. You have given away something which was not yours to give. I am willing to forgive you because of your intention, though, if the truth were known, the deed was prompted much more by pride than by pity. Worst of all, it was thoughtless. Fontanet would never have done a silly thing like that. I am sure he never went with you to that woman’s, when you took her your shirts and your nightcaps.”

I could not help grumbling a little at this eulogy of Fontanet, for I deemed it unmerited. I knew that Fontanet was no better than I was. If I am not equally sure of it to-day, it is because I have learned to be doubtful about everything.

“Listen to me, child,” my mother went on, with more firmness than she had as yet put into her reprimand. “I will tell you one effect of your foolish

behaviour. Just after you had gone, Justine found out that your chest of drawers had been ransacked. Justine is a very honest girl, but being a servant she is always afraid of being suspected. The fear of being accused of having stolen this linen was a terrible shock to her nerves—she completely lost her head. I did my best to comfort her and to assure her that I did not suspect her. She kept exclaiming that the gendarmes would come and take her and put her in prison for a crime she had never committed.”

My mother’s words made a deep impression upon me. I had seen *The Thieving Magpie, or Palaiseau’s Servant Girl*, enacted at the Comte Theatre, and I understood the throes which had rent the bosom of my beloved Justine.

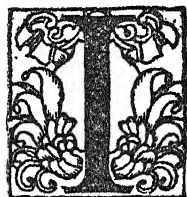
I ran to the kitchen, where I found her still plunged in the depths of despair. I kissed and hugged her with all my might, and implored her to forgive me the anguish my stupid conduct had caused her, quite against my will.

“Ah, Master Pierre,” she said in a voice broken with sobs, “if you had had more sense, you would never have done such a thing!”

Justine was right. I should never have done such a thing, if I had had more sense.

CHAPTER II

THE DAUGHTER OF THE TROGLODYTES AND HER MISFORTUNES



NO longer found in Justine that passion for destruction which, in the early days of her servanthood, had expended itself on the crockery entrusted to her care and on the bronzes presented to Dr. Nozière as tokens of esteem by grateful patients. The kitchen resounded less frequently with the crash of tumbling plates or the frenzied cries of the young servant, as she hacked indiscriminately at her finger tips and the boiled beef. The kitchen chimney caught fire less often; floods became more rare. No more the lustres fell spontaneously and of their own accord, and if my father still described her as productive of catastrophes, if he denounced the destructive genius of this simple creature, if he accused her of ceaselessly disturbing the tranquillity essential to the meditations of the scholar, it was because, like most men, he was incapable of remoulding his judgments in the light of fresh experience, and clung to his ingrained prejudices and preconceived ideas. My

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mother, with greater justice and superior powers of observation, perceived that, after the chaos of the early days, the first faint tracings of order were becoming perceptible in this servile mind, the first hesitant preludings of harmony.

Justine had made peace with the Spartacus of the clock. She struck at him no more with the stump of her plumeless feather-broom, and no more the hero threatened to crush her beneath his weight. But she obstinately refused to believe that his name was Spartacus. 'Twas in vain that I endeavoured, history and dictionary in hand, to prove to her with the ninny-like persistency of a humanist of thirteen, that such was indeed his name. All my demonstrations she greeted with a tranquil smile and invariably made answer, "No, no, Master Pierre, he's not called what you say; oh, no! I'm sure of that."

"Why not?"

"Wouldn't you just like me to tell you?"

"But, Justine, what is he called if he isn't called that?"

"He isn't called anything. It's only you who've given the old guy an ugly name."

"Justine, let me tell you that Spartacus at the head of a band of slaves held at bay four Pretorian and three Consular armies, and that when at length the Senate had sent the legions of Crassus and Pompey against him, and he was compelled to give battle, he slew his horse and——"

At this point Justine interrupted.

"I've got my lentils on; I must go and give them a stir. There's nothing catches as quickly as lentils."

"Justine," I said, clutching her by the apron, "this statue of Spartacus is the masterpiece of Monsieur Foyatier, a friend of Papa's, and a very old man now. He was a shepherd when he was a boy and, when minding his flock, he used to carve little animals out of wood with his knife."

"That's like my brother Phorien," said Justine. "When he was ever such a little fellow he used to make springes to catch birds and all kinds of contrivances while he was looking after the cattle. He was a clever little chap even then. But here! I must go and stir my lentils."

And Justine hurried off to the kitchen whence there proceeded a strong smell of burning.

This *Spartacus* of the mild Foyatier, of which the original in the Jardin des Tuileries confronted the palace with wrathful mien and threatening fists, is no friend of mine because I saw too much of him in my young days, and because he is an insipid, characterless specimen; "a tinpot gentleman" Monsieur Ménage used to call him. My father was very fond of him. Between ourselves, I don't believe he had ever seen him, not properly speaking *seen* him. He never looked at anything that had not to do with his profession, save the aspects of nature when they were smiling or sublime. What he admired in the *Spartacus* of his dear friend Foyatier was the idea, the symbol. He beheld in him the champion of the

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oppressed, and the sight was agreeable to his eyes, for he loved justice and hated tyranny.

"If I were a republican," he was wont to say, "I could at a pinch tolerate oppression for the sake of some fundamental principle, or in furtherance of some lofty interest; but I am a royalist, and the principal reason for having a King, I might even say the sole reason, is that he should safeguard the freedom of his people. A royal oppressor is a contradiction in terms."

To which my godfather would reply:

"Unfortunately, the sovereign, as a rule, robs the people of freedom in the very things that are essential to guarantee them freedom in all other things that matter not."

"That is precisely what happens when the people rule."

"Is it necessary that one man should possess our property to look after it on our behalf? Are we not capable of looking after it for ourselves?"

"By possessing all, the King, who is but a man, possesses nothing save by virtue of a legal fiction, and the people enjoy the benefit of the whole. In a democracy, on the other hand, the parties which govern and mould the multitude to their will, do, in fact, possess the collective property of the State; they defraud the people, who enjoy nothing."

"Freedom is the most precious of all possessions, on one condition, namely, that we forego it. A man

dispossesses himself of his liberty every time he avails himself of it."

"A republican never abandons the principle of liberty. That is where the difference comes in."

Thus did they argue, these two excellent men, who were both born on the morrow of that tempest which shook the social fabric to its very foundations; thus did they argue, and neither ever convinced the other, or perceived the manifest futility of his words. They were Frenchmen, and they loved an argument.

Meanwhile Justine had got a young man, and she loved him dearly. That I had observed. By what signs, you ask? Was it the eagerness with which she watched for the postman? The joy which shone in her eyes and lit up her countenance when she received a letter? Or the way she would slip that letter into her bosom? Was it the radiance of her whole being? Her odd and changeful humour? Was it her unexpected outbreaks of merriment, the tears that, of a sudden, would softly well into her eyes? I know not. But for me everything about her betrayed the secret of her heart.

And then, all at once, a gloom descended upon her. She lost her colour. Dark rings encircled her eyes. She grew thin. You could not get a word out of her. Her shrunken, tightly drawn lips seemed to be for ever barring the way out to reproaches and lamentations. When evening came, she would spread out a pack of greasy cards on the kitchen table and consult them as though they were oracles.

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Then, in a rage, she would muddle them all up again. Insensibly she fell into deep dejection. She cared no more for her saucepans; she forgot to eat and drink. She moved slowly and with an effort and, if she broke things now, it was no longer, as in former times, in a sort of untamed savage fury, but by reason of a languor which made her arms heavy and her fingers strengthless. I made no doubt that love was at the root of all these sufferings, and that Justine had lost her lover. And indeed there was no room for doubt. I had seen in Madame Letort's shop an engraving entitled "The Forsaken One," which portrayed a young woman in a black velvet gown, sitting on a seat of stone, in a forest saddened and despoiled by autumn. Justine in the kitchen, motionless on her cane chair, resembled "The Forsaken One," though she was far less pretty. The same sombre and mournful expression, the same wistful gaze losing itself in space, the same sense of weariness in the hands resting idly on her knees. Her condition excited in me the liveliest interest. Knowing the cause of her sadness, I longed that she should confide in me and suffer me to comfort her, but I had no hopes of that. I knew right well that she would not tell her sufferings to me because it is embarrassing to speak of such things to a boy, and also because she deemed me incapable of understanding anything. Her mind was made up concerning me. I mourned for her in silence.

One morning she stayed a long time alone with

my mother, more than an hour, in the little room with the rosebud wall-paper. I saw her come out in tears, but looking as though a weight had been lifted from her mind, and then I doubted not that she had told her troubles to her mistress, and that she had found consolation. No longer afraid of being indiscreet, I said to my mother:

"Justine has been forsaken by her young man. It is very sad."

And my mother looked at me with surprise.

"What," said she, "has she told you?"

"No, mamma, but I know."

And I explained how, by the unaided keenness of my intelligence, I had found out Justine's secret, but had been discreet enough to keep it to myself.

"It is a very good thing to be discreet," replied my dear mother, "but you would have been still more discreet had you forborne to try to find out things which, from every point of view, it had been better for you not to know."

Her tone was severe, but it seemed that, in spite of herself, she admired my perspicacity.

CHAPTER III

THE TRUANT



BEAR witness, innocent and amiable child that once was I, bear witness, I say, that life under the ferule of Monsieur Crottu was but a tissue of injustices. The man spun iniquities as a spider spins his web. And without claiming any undue prominence for myself, I can rightly say that, of the thirty small boys he had to teach, it was I who suffered most, in frequency and extent, from the effects of his unfairness. I should have nourished no resentment against him on that account, being accustomed from childhood to meet with rough words and harsh conduct among men. But I did not pardon him his ugliness. The reader must understand that, despite my tender years, I had a premonition of the lofty moral truths to whose heights I subsequently attained, and that, even then, youngster though I was, some familiar spirit came and whispered in my ear that the only unpardonable crimes are the crimes against beauty. I took sides with the Muses and the Graces against M. Crottu, for he grievously offended them in his

whole person. Wretched creature that he was, a thick hide covered his short fat hands which dishonoured everything whereon their heavy clumsiness descended, and which could bring him no delight from any pleasurable contact. His shifty eyes knew not how to linger on objects of loveliness. His countenance was joyless, and the only indication of pleasure he ever allowed himself was to put out his slobbering tongue as he recorded his unhallowed penalties within his grimy register. Like the rustic described, I know not where, by Nepumacène Lemerrier, he spat far and wide and blew his nose like a trumpet. Such were the grievances I had against him. I loathed him less for what he did than for what he was. Mine was a constant hatred, directed not against deeds, which vary, but against the inner man which changes not. And perhaps this hatred, deep-seated and well-nourished as it was, would never have been disclosed, perhaps it would have ever remained sealed and secret within my heart, if a circumstance for which M. Crottu was himself responsible, had not brought about its sudden revelation.

He told us one day, I forget what brought it up, how the Satyr Marsyas, daring to pit himself with his flute against Apollo, was vanquished and flayed alive by the god of the lyre.

"Marsyas," M. Crottu informed us, "had the face of an animal, a snub nose, unkempt hair, horns

on his forehead, long hairy ears, the tail of a horse, and the feet of a he-goat."

The satyr thus portrayed was none other than M. Crottu himself, M. Crottu to the life, save for the horns, the cloven feet, and the horse's tail, which were hardly permissible to regard as possible adjuncts to the person of a university graduate. But all the rest was there, and notably the enormous bushy ears. The smothered laughter, the whisperings, the exclamations which greeted this portrait of Marsyas showed clearly enough that the resemblance was apparent to the whole class. That I shouted with the rest, that I bore my part in the chorus of laughter, is likely enough. But I straightway fell into a profound study. Though quite disposed to look on Marsyas as a wrongdoer, I could not bring myself quite to approve of Apollo's conduct towards his rival. If the whole truth must be known, I thought it cruel. However, when considered in connection with a being whom I identified with M. Crottu, I gradually came to perceive in it a higher fitness, a loftier justice. I drew a sketch in my notebook of a figure in which my untutored hand endeavoured to merge the features of the satyr and the pedant. I was just succeeding in getting some expression into the drawing, and managing to make it sufficiently horrible, when M. Crottu caught sight of it, seized it and tore it up, rewarding my art with I know not what preposterous castigation. 'Twas enough. I treated him as a foe and answered his violence with

a contemptuous laugh. Late coming wisdom has since taught me that I did wrong to make too whole-hearted an avowal of my detestation.

Thenceforth, when in his presence, I affected a haughty disdain, of which I overestimated the effect. I lavished upon him all the marks of aversion and disgust which my youthful imagination could suggest. As a matter of fact it did not wholly escape him, and it increased his ill-will towards me.

His cantankerous humour vented itself with a fresh ardour on my errors and shortcomings; but it was especially the things which I did well that he would not forgive. My merits were inconsiderable, and manifested themselves but rarely; nevertheless I was not wholly devoid of intelligence, and it was occasionally vouchsafed to me to give proof of it. That M. Crottu could not endure. Did I but give him a correct answer, did he but find a well-turned phrase in my exercises, forthwith his countenance would betray the keenest vexation, his lips would quiver with rage. I succumbed beneath the weight of the iniquitous punishments he inflicted upon me. Fired with just resentment, I determined to stir up the class against the oppressor. During recreation I heaped terms of invective and execration upon his name. I reminded my schoolmates of his petty persecutions, of his deformities, of the tufts that grew in his pointed ears. Not one of them contradicted me, no one lifted his voice in his master's defence, but fear of the man weighed heavily upon their

tongues. They held their peace. At home, during meals, I occasionally endeavoured to unmask M. Crottu to my mother. Alas, no one in this world was less calculated to lend a sympathetic ear to such revelations. She, with her gracious soul nourished upon *Télémaque*, pictured to herself my masters as sages of ancient Greece, M. Crottu appearing to her imagination with the form and lineaments of Mentor. To have ousted this venerable image from her mind, and to have installed there in its stead a being with the features of a horned beast, the most consummate address would hardly have sufficed; and I went all off the lines, betraying my one-sidedness, piling up exaggerations and improbabilities, and affirming, without offering any proof, that M. Crottu's breeches concealed a horse's tail within their enormous seat. As for my father, nothing could have availed to diminish the respect he entertained for the professorial hierarchy nor the absolute trust he reposed in persons who least deserved it. Nor was I any more successful in my endeavours to expose M. Crottu to Justine. She displayed small credulity in most things, and when I recounted the iniquities of my professor, she would say:

"Mon petit maître, if you learnt your lessons properly and gave up leading the poor gentleman such a dog's life, you would have no cause to complain of him, you would be glad to have him for a master."

And then she held up her brother Symphorien as

an example to me. He was a good boy, and the schoolmaster had made him a monitor, and M. le Curé his server at Mass. "But you," she said, "you will be the death of your kind master, and you'll have to answer for it in the next world."

It was no good my adducing the most convincing facts. Justine would believe none of them. She wouldn't even believe that he was called Crottu; she said it wasn't a name.

One day I went to tell my troubles to Madame Laroque who, seated in her tapestry-covered arm-chair with a footwarmer at her feet, went on knitting blue stockings as she listened to my story. She turned a kindly ear to my tale of woe, but the poor lady was getting old. She wandered in her speech now and then, confounding the past with the present, and in some extraordinary way mixing up M. Crottu with an ex-Oratorian father, a professor at Granville who, in 1793, had given Florimond Chappedelaine the cane because he refused to shout "Long live the people." My resentment, which I was thus compelled to repress, was choking me.

I would not admit I was beaten, but needless to say that in this struggle M. Crottu was the victor.

One morning in spring, I awoke and heard the birds singing. Shafts of sunlight piercing the crevices in the shutters made a golden patchwork of my bed. I adored the light of day, and the thought of M. Crottu was more bitter to me than death. That morning my mother, as her custom was, saw

to it that my neck and ears were thoroughly clean, and that the finishing touch was put on my homework. I assumed a look of calm unconcern; but my mind was made up. At five-and-twenty minutes to eight, as usual, having swallowed my breakfast of bread and milk, and picking up my leather satchel which I had been careful not to stuff too full of books, I went downstairs into the street, followed the silver waters of the Seine, and turned down the street that led to the college. Then suddenly I swung sharply to the right and entered a thoroughfare down which until then I had never gone very far, though I knew that it was a long one, and that it led into new and delightful regions. I was in such a merry and expansive frame of mind that I shouted aloud to a little donkey that had just pulled up with his barrow of vegetables. In vain did the voice of wisdom whisper in my inward ear the gravity of my misdeed and the dangers to which I exposed myself if it were discovered, as it could scarcely fail to be since absences from school were registered and notified. I was looking to some friendly piece of good luck to pull me through, and to that happy confusion which governs the affairs of men and mitigates the rigours of Justice. And I should have deemed no price too high for so great and so rare a pleasure. In a word, I had resolved to play truant. It was a manœuvre that would deliver me from Crottu only for a single day. But there are days which seem to us eternal, as well they

may, since they render us unmindful of the Past and the Future. Everything in that old street, as it roused itself to greet the sun, seemed smiling and gay. Doubtless it was that the things about me were merely reflecting and sending back to me the joy that filled my heart. Howbeit, and a man may say it without fear of being blamed for praising the past to the detriment of the present, Paris was more lovable then than now. The houses were not so high and the gardens more numerous. At every step you could see trees drooping their leafy crests over some old wall. The houses, which were of great diversity, retained each its separate individuality of age and station. Some, which had been beautiful in days gone by, still preserved a wistful and melancholy grace. In the busy quarters, horses of every size and hue harnessed to fiacres, drays, furniture vans, barouches, lent life and movement to the street where pilfering sparrows merrily pecked at the dung. At long intervals a yellow omnibus, drawn by the dappled horses of Perche, rumbled noisily along the uneven cobbles. In those days the city did not extend to the fortifications; nor was Paris as yet the unique city of the world. A certain great Prefect was then only just beginning to construct those broad avenues which afford but too abundant access to monotony, mediocrity, ugliness and ennui. I should be very much inclined to think, taking only the central parts of the city into consideration, that, in the two long centuries which

sunder the regency of Anne of Austria from the middle of the Second Empire, Paris, accustomed as it is to revolutions, has undergone less change, than during the sixty years which separate us from the times it now pleases me to recall.

I, who now speak to you, I have known Paris with its din and crowded alleyways pretty much as Boileau described them, somewhere about the year 1660, from his garret in the Palais. Like him I have heard the cock's shrill clarion pierce the grey dawn in the very heart of the city. I have nosed the smell of stables in the Faubourg Saint Germain, I have seen places whereon a rustic air still lingered and the grace of a bygone day. It were an error to say that a child of twelve could not feel the charm of the town in which he dwelt. He breathed it in with his native air, and enjoyed it quite naturally. To aver that he appreciated to a nicety the classic symmetry of the great houses that reared their porticos and pediments betwixt court and garden, were to go too far, but, as he went his way, he took of them according to his powers and needs, knowing that what was then beyond his comprehension he was destined one day to understand. Has one got to be very advanced in years to dream of a forbidden garden wherein, through a gate ajar, you may catch a hurried glimpse of branches and of flowers? Must you have left childhood behind, to gaze with wonder and admiration on an ancient wall? The Past whispers its message to the heart of the gran-

dam and the child. The story of Mother Goose is proof enough of that, and the tales of the days when Bertha plied her spinning wheel, the fables of the time when beasts spoke with the tongues of men. And if you would know why everything imagined in the human mind, virginal or withered, sad or gay, turns towards the Past, wistful to enter there, the reason is surely that the Past is our only pleasure, the only region wherein we may find sanctuary from our daily trials, from our ills, from *ourselves*. The Present is arid and full of unrest; the Future is hidden from our sight. All the richness of the world, all its splendour, all its grace is in the Past. And that is known to children no less than to old men. Therefore no doubt it was that, from my very earliest youth, my heart was touched at the things whereof the stones of my city were eloquent, telling of past days. Alas, the old stones have yielded place to new; but they likewise will grow old and whisper their story to dreamful hearts.

As I wended my way down this long street, the houses grew humbler and more rustic; and I observed there crafts and customs unknown in the grand quarters that harboured my childhood. There, for the first time, I beheld market-gardeners in great straw hats watering their plots; sunburnt wenches milking cows; timber merchants in their yards piling logs into stacks that looked like triumphal arches, and the blacksmith standing at the threshold of his forge amid a pungent odour of

burning horn, shoeing a horse which, with one hoof aloft, was being held by another man. The blacksmith added terror to his countenance by the cultivation of grim whiskers and a pair of military mustachios. His shirt sleeves were rolled up, and on his left arm was a cross of the Legion of Honour tattooed in blue, and beneath it the words *Honneur et Patrie*. I saw him a little later at the bar of a neighbouring tavern wiping those same mustachios with the back of his hand, and genially bestowing resounding claps on the shoulder of an aged waggoner.

The sight of these workpeople imparted to me, in the space of a few minutes, more useful knowledge than I had acquired at school in three months, and it was, perhaps, on that day that there was implanted in me the germ of that fruitful love of manual toil and of those who practise it, which has remained with me my whole life through.

I vowed to myself that day, which seemed infinite, that I would leave none of life's pleasures, no sylvan delights, untasted. Down by the bank of the Seine, hard by the bridge, I came across an old woman seated on a camp stool beside a stall laden with Nanterre cakes and a bottle of liquorice water stoppered with a lemon. Those cakes and that liquor provided me with a delicious luncheon. Filled with fresh vigour, I hastened away to take a walk in the Bois de Boulogne. I entered it by way of Auteuil, which was still a village in those days, and

about its comely houses, shadowed by swaying branches, there yet lingered memories of vanished days of charm and splendour which at that time I was not able to appreciate.

Those houses were beginning to fall beneath the pick of the housebreaker, and on the dismantled gardens tall buildings were uprising. The Bois de Boulogne too was undergoing a change. Spoiled by ornamental vistas and cascades, it had lost its pristine bloom and natural charm. Beneath its shades no sacred panic evermore assailed you.

The deep places of the woods from my earliest childhood had always filled me with melancholy pleasure. Howbeit, truth compels me to admit that, having plunged into the thicket where the light fell aslant the foliage in discs of gold, I stole in haste away in fear of the marauders who disturbed my solitude. I did not relax my speed till I came to a lawn where, near la Muette, children were playing on the grass while the mothers, the big sisters and the be-ribboned nurses rested beneath the shade of the chestnut trees, seated on benches, chairs, or folding stools. There was room for me on one of the seats next a child who seemed to me like a young man, for he appeared to be about my own age. Very handsome, he was dressed as I should like to have been, with a sort of careless elegance. His cravat, a blue one with white spots, was floating in the wind. His watch was attached to his waistcoat by a gold chain. His close trimmed hair danced and twisted

in curls of ruddy gold, his eyes shone brightly, his pale but charmingly fresh-looking face was tinged with pink at the cheekbones. In his restless hands he held a pencil and a notebook, but he was not writing. I was inspired with a sudden affection for him and, shy though I was, I spoke to him first. He answered without eagerness but with a good grace, and the conversation began. He gave me to understand that he was an orphan and in ill-health, that he lived in a house on the Ranelagh with his grandmother who came of a very old Irish family that had long ago settled in France and that, through her husband, whom she had lost, she was allied to some of the most exalted representatives of the Imperial nobility.

He would have liked to go to the Lycée, to work and play with other boys, to go in for prisoner's base and football, and to carry off prizes in the big competitions. He was studying under a little abbé of whom he spoke without hatred and without love, not blaming him definitely for anything save a silk chimney-pot of extravagant height which he wore in preference to the customary clerical hat. To-day the abbé had brought him to the wood as usual. He was surprised, but not annoyed, that, contrary to custom, he had been left so long alone. He spoke with enthusiasm of the victories in the Crimea. From a window in the Place Vendôme he had seen the march past of the troops who had returned from the East, all clad in their worn and tattered uni-

forms. The wounded marched at the head of their regiment, and the women threw flowers to them. There were great outbursts of cheering as the flags and the eagles went by. The mere recollection of it all made his heart beat faster. He described, as though he had himself beheld them, the banquets and the balls at the Tuileries to which his Cousin Claire had often been invited, she having married one of the Empress's equerries. Anything in the nature of displays, exhibitions, fêtes excited his curiosity to a remarkable degree.

He would much like to have seen the assault-at-arms given by Grisier and Gâtechair in Saint Barthélemy's Hall, and he made up his mind to frequent the Comédie Française, the Théâtre Lyrique, and the Opera as soon as he was old enough. In the meantime his Uncle Gerard told him everything that went on in these three great theatres, and he always read the dramatic criticisms. He told me that Madame Miolan-Carvalho had made a remarkably successful début at the Théâtre Lyrique, and inquired whether I liked Madeleine Brohan.

"There she is," he said, extracting from his coat pocket a photograph of a very pretty blonde who was leaning with bare arms over the back of a settee.

I marvelled that he should be so closely acquainted with these theatrical matters which excited my curiosity, and of which I knew nothing. What was there he didn't know of the fashionable world,

of Art and Letters? He had seen Ponsard, he had talked with him of the Académie Française. He knew the true story and even the real name of the Dame aux Camélias. He was intimately acquainted with the preacher who had delivered the Lenten addresses at the Tuileries.

He kept asking me questions to which he did not wait for a reply.

"What do you think about table-turning? I have seen a card table turn round. Wouldn't you like to be Chaix d'Est Ange? I know *I* should. I should like to be a great orator. But I have been too ill to do any regular study. The doctors say that it is still necessary for me to be very careful. They are sending me to Nice for the winter."

After a few moments' silence, he opened his notebook and clumsily drew, on a blank page, a figure which was intended to represent an isosceles triangle, and which he showed me with a smile.

"You see that?"

"Yes, it's a triangle."

"Yes, it's a triangle, and it's my life."

Slowly, and with apparent reluctance, he drew, between the two equal sides and beginning at the base, a series of lines parallel to the said base, which necessarily became shorter and shorter as they neared the apex. And while he was thus engaged he kept saying in an undertone:

"Five years—ten years—twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years. . . ."

"See," he exclaimed, "how the lines grow shorter and shorter, and what the end of it all is."

After a moment's hesitation he touched the apex of the triangle with the point of his pencil:

"Seventeen years! then suffocation, and it's all over."

Then he quickly shut the book, lifted up his head, and said firmly:

"But I shall get better. I know I shall get better. The doctors thought it was my lungs that were affected. They were wrong; it was the heart. I get palpitations. It's the heart."

After a pause he asked me whether I should like to be a naval officer.

"That's what I should like to be," he added with a far-off dreamy look in his eyes.

And old lady in a russet dress with flounces, dilated by a majestic crinoline, now came up to us.

"That's Grandmamma," he murmured.

She sat down beside him, took off her gloves, felt his hands, and touched his cheeks.

"Cyrille," said she, "your hands are hot and your forehead is damp. I am sure you have tired yourself with talking." Then lowering her voice, but not sufficiently to prevent my hearing, she added:

"Cyrille, you ought not to talk to a child you do not know; especially when he has no one with him."

I was already feeling as though I were Cyrille's friend. It therefore pained me to behold myself thrust away from him with such disdain. I did not

fail to notice that he had become silent and forbore to look my way. I arose and departed sick at heart, without turning my head.

When I had proceeded some distance, ruminating upon Cyrille, and lamenting that a friendship so swiftly made had so soon been lost, I saw, seated on the grass at the edge of a lonely footpath, a tall girl and a little urchin, the similarity of their features proclaiming them brother and sister. Their appearance suggested at once the suburb and the country. Both had little gimlet eyes quaintly surmounted by pointed eyebrows. Their faces were peppered all over with freckles, and their mouths reached from ear to ear. They had such an impudently happy look about them, that you could not look at them without a smile. The girl was dressed in flowered muslin, the boy in a brand-new blue blouse. They were munching great mouthfuls of jam tart and swilling with gusto something out of a big bottle.

Seeing me eyeing them with curiosity, the boy, rubbing his hand up and down his stomach, held out the bottle and shouted:

"It's all right I can tell you. Have some?"

It was awkwardness rather than disdain that caused me to turn away without an answer, and it did not occur to me that I was marking the distance that sundered the little bourgeois that I was, from the sylvan couple, still more arrogantly than the old dame in the crinoline had registered the gulf between her grandson and the wandering, unknown child.

Meanwhile I was growing hungry, and I perceived with a shock that the shadows of the trees were lengthening. I took out my watch and found that I had only half an hour and five minutes to get back home at the usual time. Arriving somewhat late, all out of breath, and with a distinctly grassy smell about me, I there encountered my Aunt Chausson, who asked me if I was sticking to my work, and what I had been doing all day.

Her arrival was timely, and her questions opportune. I should have felt some compunction in lying to my mother, but I deemed it an act of piety to deceive my Aunt Chausson. I accordingly made answer that I had learnt more things that day than I had learnt in the previous six months, and that I had not wasted my time.

My Aunt Chausson was loud in her praises of my healthy appearance, and sagely observed that work never hurt anybody.

I had calculated that, thanks to the confusion that prevailed in the school where I was, my absence would pass unnoticed. And it was so. Among the many fortunate effects of that guilty and delicious holiday I must mention one that was highly singular. I beheld M. Crottu without displeasure, I hated him no longer.

CHAPTER IV

MADAME LAROQUE



WHEN I had nearly finished dressing, my mother said:

"Madame Laroque is very ill. She is going to die. Her daughters sent for you this morning. You will find them both at the bedside.

Make haste, my dear."

I was surprised. There had been some talk about a cold, but I hadn't taken any notice.

"They have had a dreadful night," my mother went on. "At ninety-three she is fighting her illness with extraordinary tenacity. She is calm again this morning."

I hurried off. At the door of the sick room an invisible barrier struck me on the chest and brought me to a standstill. The great silence was only broken by the rattle in the throat of the dying woman. The elder of the two daughters, Mother Séraphine, wearing a nun's habit, her face as yellow as an antique waxen image, was standing beside the bed, stirring something in a glass with a little silver spoon. Her mien was grave and simple, far above the common order, and she performed her lowly

ministrations with an ascetic calm that befitted the solemn and familiar scene. Thérèse, the younger sister, her face all puffed and drawn with sleeplessness and weeping, her white hair sticking out in little wisps, sat thoroughly worn out, her elbows on her knees and her knuckles in her cheeks, gazing in a sort of placid torpor at her mother. I did not recognize the room, although nothing was changed within it save that a medley of bottles, phials, and glasses encumbered the night table and the chimney-piece. To the left was the bed, so high that I could not see the dying woman. Over the bed was a holy water stoup upborne by two angels in coloured china, a crucifix and a pastel portrait of Thérèse when she was young and slender, with big brown side-curls, wearing a cinnamon-coloured dress with leg of mutton sleeves which gave her a sylph-like figure. At the other end of the room was the window hung with old red cotton curtains. To the right stood the mahogany chest of drawers on which was set out a coffee service in white porcelain adorned with a broad thread pattern in gilt; on the wall above hung a daguerreotype of Madame Laroque, and a head of Romulus, after David, drawn in black crayon by Mother Séraphine when she was a little girl. And those four walls, homely and commonplace as they were, took on an air of majesty.

"Come in, Pierre," said the nun.

I drew near the bed. Madame Laroque's face

had not changed. Her distended stomach made a hillock of the bedclothes. Her withered hands were picking at the sheets. The dying woman lay with her eyes half-closed and recognized no one. She must have felt the gnawing pangs of hunger, for she kept calling for something to eat, and asked in a gruff voice if she was at the inn since there was so little provender. The death rattle went on but she lay perfectly still. I had been at her side about half an hour when she showed signs of agitation. Her face was burning, and a few thin grey hairs, escaping from beneath her night-cap, were sticking to her moist temples.

She spoke, and her words, though they came in gasps, were quite distinct.

"Ho, there, Jeannette! Come up, Jeannette! Wait a bit, mother. I must put the cow into house. You can't see a thing now. . . . Mother, I've given them some pea-soup and an omelet. . . . 'Tis the poachers, the poachers! . . ."

She was dreaming she was a child again and home in her native village.

"Mother, it's quite dark. You can't see a thing. I'm going to light the lamp" (*la vue*—which she pronounced *veue*. Such is the name of the little lamps of antique shape which are hung up over the hearth in Normandy homesteads).

"Mother, I'm going to make some wheatmeal cakes for little Pierre; he loves them so."

When they heard her say that, her two daughters

gave a sudden start. As for me, a strange and terrible feeling came over me, at hearing myself thus mixed up with the people and things of another age.

Thérèse remained huddled in her low armchair. Mother Séraphine took me back to the lobby and said in a quiet voice :

"She was quite herself when she received the Sacraments. The Abbé Moinier administered them to her. From the very beginning the doctor held out no hope, and our mother's great age did not permit us to harbour any illusions as to her recovery. On Friday she was taken with senile pneumonia. Intestinal paralysis set in almost immediately. Thérèse is very fatigued, she cannot do without sleep."

And Mother Séraphine, her hands folded together within the sleeves of her habit, made me an imperceptible sign with her head. Her mind was grave and austere like her habit. Her sadness was made beautiful by peace. Through the door of the kitchen you could hear Navarino the parrot who kept saying :

"I've some good 'baccy got,
Inside my—eh what, what?"

When I came back in the evening the blinds were down. There were no longer any glasses, measures, or bottles on the night table. Two candles were burning on it, and a sprig of box lay in a saucer of holy water. Madame Laroque, with her hands

clasped over a crucifix, was sleeping peacefully, looking quite white.

"Give her one last kiss, Pierre," said the nun, "she loved you as though you were her own child. In her last moments, before she began to wander, she thought of you. 'You must'—these were her words to us—'give Pierre a gold watch, and on the case of it you must have engraved the date when ——' she never finished. And from that moment she recognized no one."

CHAPTER V.

MONSIEUR DUBOIS



THAT week my report was lamentable. My conduct was bad, my progress nil. My poor mother, in terrible affliction, besought M. Dubois to speak to me.

"Since you are kind enough to take an interest in the child," said she, "give him a scolding. He will pay more heed to you than to me. Make him understand the harm he is doing himself by neglecting his studies."

"How would you have me make him recognize this harm," answered M. Dubois, "if I do not recognize it myself?"

And, producing a volume from his pocket, he read these lines:

"Homer did not spend ten years shut up in school to be whipped into learning a few words which he could have learnt better at home in five or six months."

"And do you know who said that, Madame Nozière? A clown, think you, an ignoramus, an enemy of learning? No, it was a gentle soul, a very learned man, the best writer of his time, which

was the time of Chateaubriand, a witty satirist, a lover of Greek, the man who so charmingly translated the pastoral *Daphnis and Chloe*, the man who wrote the most delightful letters in the world: it was Paul Louis Courier."

My mother gazed at M. Dubois with an expression of pained surprise; and the old man, gently pulling me by the ear, said:

"My friend, it is not everything merely to be deaf to these learned prigs, the enemies of Nature; you must hearken to the voice of Nature herself, for only she can teach you to understand Virgil and instruct you in the law of numbers. Lose not a moment, when you are free, in making up for the time you have to waste at school."

Monsieur Dubois was then a tall old man of seventy or seventy-two, who held his head erect, bowed with elegance, and displayed a manner which was at once affable and distant. He wore his hair brushed straight up, and two short side whiskers, trimmed after the fashion of his youth, relieved his long, smooth visage. His features were severe, his smile charming. He usually wore a long bottle-green frock-coat, took snuff from an oval tortoise-shell snuff-box, and blew his nose in an enormous handkerchief of red foulard.

He had become acquainted with my family through his sister, who had been a patient and a friend of my father's. After her death M. Dubois still continued to visit at our house. In fact, he

was there very often. If I had not heard M. Dubois discussing matters with my father, with whose opinions on every conceivable subject he disagreed; if I had never seen him paying his devoirs to my mother, who was too artless and too shy to encourage elaborate addresses, I should never have conceived the pitch of perfection to which a man of refined breeding can bring the art of good behaviour and courteous reserve. Descended from well-to-do professional people, barristers, magistrates under the old régime, M. Dubois, from his upbringing and associations belonged to the old courtly school of French society. People called him selfish and stingy. It is my impression that for him the great problem was to live, and that, with an establishment reduced to the uttermost, he did not go out of his way to seek occasions for displaying generosity. He was a man of settled habits, who loved and practised simplicity, making it at once a pleasure and a virtue. He lived alone with his old housekeeper Clorinde, who was devoted to him. But "she drank," a circumstance which made things difficult, and, perhaps, M. Dubois was led to frequent our house by the desire to escape from his own.

M. Dubois displayed a kindliness towards me which I valued the more because it proceeded from an old man who had no partiality for the young. I won his favour, as I think, by listening to him with attention; for he was given to telling stories, and, child as I was, I was nearly always interested in what

he said. By the time I was nearing my fourteenth year I was wholly in his good books. I am not exaggerating when I say that he talked to me more readily than to my father. Even now, after all these years, I still have his voice in my ear. It was not a loud voice, and he never raised it. His pronunciation, like that of his contemporaries, differed from that of the present day. It was softer and more liquid. M. Dubois said *mame* for *madame*, *Sèves* for *Sèvres*, *Luciennes* for *Louvenciennes*. He said *segret* for *secret*, never sounded double letters, pronounced *commentaire* as we pronounce *comment*, and in such words as *fil*, *ours*, *dot*, *legs*, *lacs* always left the final consonants mute.

Of his life I knew but little, and was at no pains to learn more. At that time I was not curious about the past, as I am now. At twenty years of age, when the Imperial sun was setting, he was in the army, and had been through the 1812 campaign as aide-de-camp to General D. He had had his ears frostbitten at Smolensk. M. Dubois was no lover of Napoleon, whom he blamed with equal bitterness for having caused five hundred thousand men to perish in Russia, and for having worn during the campaign a Polish cap, which was doubtless becoming enough to the magnates of the country, but which made him look like an old woman.

"He was both inquisitive and garrulous," added M. Dubois. "A regular gossip in fact. When I saw him he was fat and sallow. His appearance

must not be judged by his busts and his portraits. The artists, by his orders, imparted a classic touch to his features. He was common in his manners, and rude to women; he smothered himself with snuff, and ate with his fingers."

At this my godfather, M. Danquin, who adored the Emperor, nearly bounded out of his seat.

"And I too, I saw him," he would cry. "In 1815, when I was a child of eight, I was riding pickaback on my father's shoulders. The Emperor was making his entry into Lyons, and his face was supremely beautiful. It was thus that I beheld him, and thus the immense concourse of people beheld him too, all of them petrified at the sight of that splendid countenance, as though their eyes had looked on the head of Medusa. None could withstand his glance. His hands, which had moulded the world, were small, like a woman's hands, and perfect in shape."

In those days Napoleon still lived vividly in men's minds. His glory had not been dimmed by the passing of two generations. Not a score of years had gone by since he came borne on his funeral car to sleep beside the waters of the Seine. Two of his sisters, three of his brothers, his son and his marshals, passing in succession to the grave had, each in turn, as they departed, awakened an echo of his name. One of his brothers, many of his generals, and a multitude of his soldiers and associates were still alive. A few simple-minded old

people, like my nurse Mélanie, believed that the Emperor himself was living yet. All the discussions concerning him engendered heat.

"He was the greatest soldier that ever lived," M. Danquin would say.

"Agreed," M. Dubois would retort, "if you measure his greatness by his defeats."

And the controversy thus begun always developed along the same lines.

M. DANQUIN. He had a genius for war, as he had a genius for all things. His eagle eye took in everything at a glance. He possessed presence of mind, the gift of memory, knowledge of men, the power to sway the crowd, and an unequalled faculty for work. He grasped the minutest details, and subordinated them to the whole. In action he transcended the uttermost limits which, until then, had been assigned to human endurance.

M. DUBOIS. He understood men, but he hated men of ability. He would have none but mediocrities about him; none but a pack of subalterns and clerks. And when, in his hour of trial, he had need of men, there were none at hand. No doubt he was intelligent. He was clear-sighted enough, so long as ambition did not becloud his mental vision; but he had a commonplace mind. He looked on men and things, not as a philosopher, but as an administrator. Indifferent to theories, a stranger to philosophy of any kind, he took no account of anything that did not further his schemes. Even in mechanics, where

he was upon his own ground, he brushed aside everything that did not, in his view, appear to promise some immediate advantage, such as the application of steam to land and water transport. He never took interest in an idea for its own sake or in a piece of pure speculation. The genius of Lavoisier, of Bichat, of Laplace was unguessed at by him. Thought and thinkers were anathema to him.

M. DANQUIN. That is merely another way of saying that ideology and empty ideas were repugnant to his disposition. His genius was for action.

M. DUBOIS. He had no sense of moderation. He exhibits some amazing contrasts. He is all for action, and, behold, he relapses into romanticism. He is a strange mixture of the great man and the child. Look at him in those sketches which Girodet made of him unawares in the theatre at Saint Cloud. Look at his head, it's the head of a child; a Titian's child if you will, but still a child. In matters intellectual he retains a child's power of make-believe, illusion; a child's taste for the colossal, the excessive, the marvellous; a child's inability to resist his desires, and an irresponsibility of mind which accompanied him in the gravest situations, and that faculty of forgetting which most men lose on emerging from childhood but which endured, in his case, all through his riper years.

M. DANQUIN. He had good reason for occasionally relaxing a mind that was stretched to break-

ing point. He had compressed the entire world within it.

M. DUBOIS. He was a gambler and, like all gamblers, he came to grief at last. "A man would never do anything," he said on one occasion, "if he waited for all the chances to be in his favour." In that utterance the gambler stands revealed. Gamblers must have strong excitements. Their whole pleasure depends on the hazard of the event. The attraction would cease to exist if the issue were foreseen. He loved war better than peace because, in war, there are more risks and more hazards. When he lost in the military game, it was to the same game that he looked to redeem his losses.

And what did he leave behind him, this hero of yours? What did he achieve? He passed judgment on himself at Munich in 1805—or 1809 was it?—when, discovering a portrait of Charles XII in the room that had been made ready for him, he said, with an air of imperial disdain: "Take away that portrait. He was a man who brought nothing to pass." That day he passed sentence on himself before the bar of History, he who, among all the great men of the world, was fated to be the man that wrought nothing.

M. DANQUIN. Wrought nothing! He saved France from anarchy, he consolidated the conquests of the Revolution, welded, in the furnace of his genius, the old order and the new, and thus obtained an alloy unique in strength, richness and beauty,

proof against fire and steel, against the burning brands of civil conflict and the cannon of the foreign foe. He created the new France and gave to our country that which is more precious to her than gold, more necessary than bread; he gave her Glory!

And M. Danquin's seals sounded the charge upon his rotund abdomen, while M. Dubois turned his snuff-box about between his fingers as though seeking for some association between its concrete geometrical form and the invisible outlines of his thought. It was a group worthy of figuring in Raphael's *School of Athens*.

My godfather had a taste for battles, which he had only beheld in pictures. M. Dubois had crossed the Beresina and brought back with him a horror of war. Having resigned his commission in 1814, he did not resume service under the Restoration, for which he had no more love than for the Empire. He longed for a Marcus Aurelius.

CHAPTER VI

BIFURCATION



THAT year, the week before we went back to school, I saw Fontanet who had just come home from Étretat. His face was tanned with the salt spray, and the tone of his voice was graver than before. He was as small as ever, but he made up for the shortness of his stature by the loftiness of his ideas. Having given me an account of all his doings in the way of games, bathing and boating expeditions and hair-breadth escapes, he knit his brows, and addressing me with some sternness, said:

“Nozière, we shall be going up into the senior school this term. It’s our bifurcation year. You’ve got an important decision to make. Have you been thinking it over at all?”

I replied that I had not, but that I should certainly choose Literature.

“And how about you?” I inquired. At this question he gathered the clouds about his brows, and answered gravely that it was a serious matter, and not one to be settled offhand.

And he left me in a state of perplexity; humiliated and jealous at his wisdom.

To understand the meaning of the words exchanged by Fontanet and myself, you must know that at that period the *alumni* of the University of France, after they had passed through the junior forms, were called upon to determine whether they would specialize in Classics and Literary subjects, or whether they would devote themselves to Science and Mathematics. They had in a word "to bifurcate," as it used to be called, and to decide, in the light of their parents' wisdom and their own, along which branch of the pedagogic fork they were going to proceed. Nevertheless, the obligation which was laid on them to choose between eloquence and algebra, instead of following the whole choir of the Muses now disunited by M. Fortoul, did not seem to weigh with any great heaviness upon them.

Howbeit, whatever decision we might come to, our minds were bound to suffer considerable injury, for Science, being divorced from Letters, remains mechanical and crude; while Letters, bereft of Science, are windy and hollow, since Science is the substance of Letters. These considerations, let me observe, were far from troubling my little head.

What may cause some measure of surprise is that my parents never alluded to the matter in their talks with me. If I were asked to give reasons for their reticence I could adduce one or two, such as my father's shyness—he never would dare to put

his own ideas forward—or my mother's agitation—she would never allow hers to come to birth. But the principal reason why they said nothing was that my mother never doubted that, whatever line I followed, my genius, occasionally obscured but always ardent, was bound to make itself felt in the long run; whereas my father deemed that whether I “opted” for Literature or for Science, I should never do any good at either. There was another reason for my father saying nothing in my hearing concerning this scholastic regulation. Coming into force after the *Coup d'État*, in pursuance of a decree issued by M. Hippolyte Fortoul, Chancellor of the University in 1852, it was mixed up with questions of burning political interest. Being a zealous Catholic, my father approved of a reform which appeared to favour the Church at the expense of the University, but being, likewise, an opponent of the Empire, he looked askance on gifts that proceeded from the enemy, and knew not what to think. His reserve prevented me from forming my opinion in the manner usual with me, which was to take the view that was diametrically opposed to his own. However, I was all in favour of Literature, which struck me as easy, elegant, and *débonnair*, and I only affected to be wrestling with a problem of magnitude, in order to look important, and not to appear inferior in gravity to Fontanet. I slept quite peacefully that night. Next morning, coming upon Justine as

she was sweeping the dining-room, I put on a sombre air and said to her in a grave voice:

"Justine, I'm going into the Upper School this term. It's bifurcation year. I've got to make up my mind on a matter that will affect the whole course of my career. Just think of it, Justine, bifurcation!"

When she heard these words, the daughter of the Troglodytes leaned upon her broom as Minerva leaned upon her lance. She stood plunged in thought, then glancing at me with a look of consternation on her face, she exclaimed:

"Lor! Is that God's truth?"

It was the first time in her life that she had heard the word bifurcation, which she was unable to understand. Howbeit, she asked not what it signified, for she herself had, there and then, attached a meaning to it, and clearly that meaning was a sinister one. I conjecture that she thought she recognized in bifurcation one of those scourges inflicted upon the community by the government, such as conscription or taxation, and that though not as a rule very tender-hearted, she felt grieved that I should fall a victim to it.

The morning sun lit up the blue eyes and pink cheeks of the daughter of the Troglodytes. She had rolled up her sleeves, and showed her white arms, striped with red scratches, and, for the first time, she appeared beautiful to me. Some reminiscence of my poetic reading made me see in her a priestess of Apollo, radiant with majesty and youth, and in

myself a young shepherd of Orchomenus who had come to Delphi to inquire of the god what road to knowledge it behooved him to choose. The sacred Pytho was but ill-represented by the doctor's dining-room, but the tiled stove, surmounted as it was by the bust of Jupiter Trophonius, bore, in my eyes, a sufficiently close resemblance to a sacred shrine, and my imagination, which in those days made up for all defects, presented me with a landscape *à la* Poussin.

"I have got to bifurcate," quoth I with gravity, "and to choose between Literature and Science."

Thrice Apollo's priestess shook her head and then said:

"My brother Symphorien is good at Science. He got a prize for sums, and another for catechism at his school."

And then, pushing her broom before her, she said as she made to depart:

"I must be getting on with my work now."

I pressed her to tell me whether I ought to choose the Sciences.

"To be sure you ought not, Master Pierre," she answered with all the sincerity of her heart, "you aren't clever enough."

And then she added, for my consolation:

"It's not given to every one to be clever. It's a gift from God."

I did not regard it as totally incredible that I was as stupid as the daughter of the Troglodytes

considered me, but I was not sure about it, and on this point, as on so many others, I remained in a condition of uncertainty. It never occurred to me to feed my mind or to cultivate my intelligence, and as touching this matter of bifurcation, I pursued no end but my own tranquillity and my own pleasure and, as I have already said, I decided in favour of Literature as being less rigid and less heavy than the other subjects. The sight of a figure in geometry, far from arousing my curiosity, made me heavy with sadness and outraged my young æsthetic sense. A circle was well enough; but an angle, a conic section, ah no! To make one's home in that melancholy, sapless world, all angles and excrescences, when the realm of letters could at least offer you forms and colours, where ever and anon you might espy fauns and nymphs and shepherds, where you might catch a glimpse of the trees beloved of the poets and the shadows which fall from the mountain tops at eventide, how could one make so grim a choice?

But this stupid disdain for geometry I now humbly abjure at your feet, O Thales old, Pythagoras, fabled King of numbers, Hipparchus, thou who didst first essay the measurement of worlds, Galileo, who wast too wise to court suffering, yet didst suffer in the cause of truth, Fermat, Huyghens, curious Leibnitz, Euler, Monge and you, Henri Poincaré, on whose silent face, weighty with genius, I have gazed with my own eyes; O ye greatest among men, heroes, demi-gods, before your altars I bring my vain offer-

ing of praise to Uranian Venus that she may shower upon you her most precious gifts.

But in those far-off days, poor little ass that I was, I hurried off to shout, without knowledge or discernment, "I opt for Literature."

I fancy that I was even braying out blasphemies against geometry and algebra when godfather Danquin appeared before me, all in pink and beflowered. He had come to fetch me in order that I might share with him in one of his favourite amusements.

"Pierrot," said he, "you must have had a pretty slow time of it these six weeks that you have been loafing about on holiday. Come along with me and hear Monsieur Vernier lecture on dirigible balloons."

Monsieur Joseph Vernier, still in the flower of early manhood, had brought himself into prominence by carrying out several daring ascents. His ardour and intrepidity had fired the enthusiasm of my godfather, who took a violent interest in the progress of aviation.

As we went along, on the top of an omnibus, my excellent godfather explained to me with great enthusiasm the future of aerial navigation. Being in no doubt but that the problem of the dirigible balloon would shortly be solved, he foretold that I should live to see the day when the air routes would be thronged by countless travellers.

"When that day comes," said he, "there will be no more frontiers. All the peoples will be but

one people, and peace will reign over the whole world."

M. Joseph Vernier was to give his lecture in one of the halls of a great factory at Grenelle. To enter it you had to pass by a hangar where you could see the balloon in which the young aeronaut had made a perilous ascent. It was lying there deflated, like the lifeless body of some fabulous monster. And every one looked with curious interest at the great rent in its envelope. Hard by the balloon you could see the screw which, it was said, had for a few seconds given steerage way to the huge craft. Having been ushered into the adjoining hall, we saw several rows of chairs already occupied by the audience, amid whom the women's hats gave little splashes of colour, and whence arose the hum of conversation. At the far end of the hall was a platform on which stood a table and two empty armchairs facing the audience. I devoured the scene with eagerness. After waiting ten minutes or so, we saw the young aeronaut, who mounted the three stairs to the platform amid loud applause, with a distinguished company in his wake. Clean-shaven, spare, pale, and grave as Bonaparte, his countenance wore upon it the impassivity of an historic mask. Two elderly members of the Institute took their seats at his side. Both of them were preternaturally ugly and resembled the two cynocephali which, in ancient Egyptian ritual, were placed on the right and left of the dead man at his

trial and judgment. Behind the orator were seated certain important personages, conspicuous among whom was a tall and very handsome lady in a green dress who resembled the woman that typifies Christian art on the fresco painted by Paul Delaroche on the hemicycle of the Palais des Beaux Arts. My heart beat high. Joseph Vernier spoke in a low, monotonous voice that accorded well with the immobility of his countenance. He at once proceeded to enunciate his principle. "To navigate the air," he said, "you must have an apparatus for generating steam to drive a screw whose revolutions would be calculated mathematically, similar to those which have rendered possible the valves of the turbine and the exhaust pipes of the steamship's screw."

He then referred in great detail to the shape of the balloon which, he said, should be as elongated as possible in the direction in which the balloon had to travel.

One of the cynocephali signified approval and gave the signal for applause; the other remained perfectly impassive.

The speaker next gave an account of his perilous experiences, and told us how, when landing on one occasion, the anchor broke and the balloon travelling at a great rate, close along the ground, broke down all the trees, hedges, and other obstacles that lay in its path, bumping the car and its crew among the débris. He also thrilled us, as he recounted in plain straightforward language, how, when the

valve refused to work on one occasion, the balloon rose to a height at which respiration was impossible. The envelope had swollen to bursting point, when Vernier gave it a slit. The rent, however, extended right up to the top, and they came down at a hideous rate. The aeronauts would have been killed outright if the car had not happened to fall into a lake. By way of rounding off his discourse, he gave out that he was opening a subscription to defray the cost of constructing the apparatus necessary for aerial navigation.

He was loudly applauded. The two cynocephali shook him warmly by the hand. The lady in green presented him with a bouquet of flowers, while, with throbbing heart and eyes welling with generous tears, I exclaimed within me, "I, too, will be an aeronaut." I could not sleep a wink that night for thinking of the exploits of M. Joseph Vernier, and dwelling with anticipated pride on the glory I was to derive from my aerial voyages. It seemed to me that for the building, management, and steering of balloons a tremendous lot of technical knowledge was required. I resolved to plump for Science.

The first thing in the morning I imparted my determination to Justine, and the reasons which inspired it. She told me that her brother Symphorien made balloons out of paper, and sent them up into the air after holding them over a brazier. But that was only a pastime. She did not think people ought to go up to heaven when they were

still alive, and she looked with disfavour on voyages to the Moon because Cain was a prisoner there. She had seen him one clear night carrying a faggot of thorns on his back.

For three days I held firmly to my resolve, but on the fourth the Virgilian myrtles and the hidden pathways of the forest of the shades renewed their old temptation. I renounced my glorious projects of conquering the air and, as if nothing had happened, took that side of the fork that led to the class of M. Lerond. I felt a little puffed up about the thing and looked down on my friends who had chosen the other course. Such was the usual effect of bifurcation. As was bound to happen, and as that *esprit de corps* (which is talked about so much by those who don't possess it) would have it, there was a feeling of mutual disdain between the Literature and the Science pupils. As one of the former, I espoused the prejudices of my class and was pleased to mock at the bald unloveliness of the others' mental furniture. They may have been a little lacking in elegance and the humanities. But then, what stupid figures we cut, we the literary lights.

However, my own experience of the process of bifurcation must not be taken as a criterion of the merits of that system, since, by nature, I was incapable of deriving any advantage from instruction given in common. Into the science classes, no less than into the literary classes, I should have brought

a stubborn intelligence and a rebellious spirit. What little I have learned I have learned alone.

I am of opinion that bifurcation hastened the decline of classical studies which no longer answered the requirements of a middle class society wholly given over to industry and finance. It has been said that the Education Minister of 1852 did everything in his power to vilify university teaching, which was looked upon in high quarters as a public danger. He cut away its noblest branches, and made so bold as to say, "Historical and philosophical discussions are ill adapted for children, and these ill-timed studies are merely productive of vanity and doubt." Of a surety that is not the language of an educationist eager to awaken the intelligence of the young. Fortoul fondly imagined he was laying the foundations of an era of peace, and proposed to give the sons of the middle classes, who had grown up under a liberal monarchy, an education suited to the business careers which they were destined to follow. At this time a bourgeois-minded professor, who had remained faithful to the July monarchy, expressed these intentions with sufficient clearness in the following words: "Our sons are not destined to be professors. We don't want to make poets and literary men of them. Poetry and literature are too precarious as a livelihood. We don't want them to be barristers; there are enough of them already. We want them to be good business men, good farmers. Now for

people in these walks of life, and they make up the bulk of society, what is the good of the Latin and Greek which you teach them and which they quickly forget? We can't all be writing books, pleading causes, or teaching others. The vast majority of people are outside the ambit of the learned professions. What do your colleges do for them? Nothing at all, or nothing that's any good."

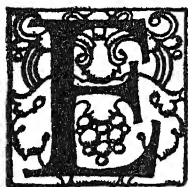
Anyone with the slightest measure of dignity in his composition must feel his gorge rise at these coarse and ignoble words. I recall them because the state of mind which inspired them still exists. For half a century now secondary education has been constantly declining. It stands condemned. Society to-day will not brook that the poor man's child should go to the elementary school, and only the rich man's to the lycée, where, moreover, he learns nothing. After this monstrous war, whose disintegrating effect no single institution has escaped, we must reconstruct our educational system after a new plan, on lines of majestic simplicity. There must be the same teaching for rich and poor. All alike must go to the elementary school. Those who exhibit the greatest aptitude for study will pass on to the secondary school which, being free to all, will gather together on the same benches the flower of middle class and proletarian youth. And this élite will, in its turn, send on its own élite to the great schools of science and art.

To return to the fabulous days of my childhood,

I would add that the instinct which directed me to literary studies was not entirely fallacious. In those grimy schoolrooms there appeared to my eyes the vision of Greece and Rome—Greece, that unfolded to men the secrets of Science, and Beauty; Rome, that imposed peace upon the world.

CHAPTER VII

MOURON POUR LES PETITS OISEAUX



VERY year, when I was a boy at school, those who had come out top in any subject met together at dinner on the 28th January, which was the feast of St. Charlemagne. My chances of ever taking part in this banquet of princes were small. I was too remote from the top of my form, well content to enjoy the obscurity of a place somewhere about its middle. Not that I was idle. On the contrary, I worked as hard as anybody, and sometimes harder. But the more I worked, the farther I receded from the top of the class. The reason of this was that I applied myself to studies wholly extraneous to the classical curriculum, and that with an attention which completely absorbed my faculties. One after another, some subject of burning interest would attract me and hold me enthralled, body and soul. And so it was that year. For three weeks after the school went back I was held captive by Queen Nitocris. I thought but of her, I saw but her, she was the very breath of my nostrils. The subjects of the syllabus, exercises, translations, readings, the

fables of Æsop, the Lives of Cornelius Nepos, the Punic Wars, all were as nothing in my eyes. My mind was closed to all ~~that~~ did not appertain to Queen Nitocris. Never was there affection more exclusive. When these feelings subsided (for nothing endures forever) my mother happened to give me, one day, a sprig of mistletoe, telling me that it was a plant held sacred by the Druids. For weeks afterwards I saw nought but deep forests, white-robed priestesses, golden sickles, and bundles of mistletoe. Next 'twas the bees of Aristæus that possessed by soul, and the golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides. My mind being thus occupied was divested of all appearance of intelligence, and it may be conceived that, when I was in this state, I was little calculated to excite esteem in the mind of my form master, M. Beaussier. Now M. Beaussier was a just man. His disposition was grave, even slightly morose. He was a level-headed man, though somewhat limited in outlook, at least so far as my recollection goes. Towards me he displayed a severity unmitigated by a grain of pity, for in his heart and inmost consciousness he looked on me as an evil and perverted spirit. Howbeit, despite my meditative cast of mind, I possessed one inclination which I have since completely laid aside. I was in love with glory. Yes, notwithstanding the deformities of my mental equipment, which earned for me, in perpetuity, the contempt of M. Beaussier and cut me off for ever from the flower of scholarly

society, I would fain have shone among my classmates and have carried off the laurel like a hero of old. Yes, I was in love with glory. The university atmosphere which, in spite of all, had informed my spirit, caused me to look with the same indiscriminating admiration on the victors of Salamis and the heroes of the school prize-lists. I was in love with glory. The Napoleonic discipline, to which I was subjected, made me sigh for the crown of green paper, even as it would, later on, have inspired me with a longing for crosses, insignia and gold lace, if only I had kept on the right path. I loved glory; I envied our illustrious ones.

There were three in particular, grave, serious, imposing fellows, a trifle heavy maybe, but steady, aye, and stubborn, who carried off all the laurels and filled the topmost places, to wit Radel, Laperlière, and Maurisset. All three were boarders, and this gave a semi-military cast to their behaviour, so that they looked down with a soldier's contempt for the civilian on day-scholars like me who were not, so to speak, on the strength. They had that *esprit de corps* which was totally lacking in me, and which, to my misfortune, I was never destined to acquire. They were supreme in games as they were in class, and displayed at saddle-my-nag and prisoner's base that mastery which we had come to associate with them in Greek exercises and Latin orations. Such greatness amazed more than it

charmed me, and my feelings towards them were of admiration rather than affection.

Every week, on Saturday night, when he gave out the marks for composition, exercises, translation, Latin oration and the rest of it, M. Beaussier was wont to declare that, having bestowed prolonged attention upon the work handed in by these three excellent pupils, he had had the greatest difficulty in deciding whose was the best of the three. In his view, Radel, Laperlière, and Maurisset were all equal. He might, perhaps, say that Radel's work was a shade the more correct, Laperlière's a shade the more elegant, and Maurisset's a shade the more concise. Conciseness, according to M. Beaussier, was perhaps Maurisset's strongest point. Remote from all that was said and done in the class, neglecting the most useful precepts, ignorant of the most necessary rules, the exercises and versions that I produced were far removed from such correctness, elegance, and conciseness. All the products of my pen were crammed with solecisms and barbarisms, with inaccurate or impossible renderings. When his eyes lighted on my paper M. Beaussier's countenance would suddenly take on an expression of sadness, of gloomy reproof. His thin, sinuous lips would be contracted with pain, and he would reproach me in bitter language for the inaccuracies with which my work abounded, and for my bad taste in laying them thus naked before his eyes. This bad taste of mine gave great pain to M. Beaussier, and

the burden of his rebukes lay the more heavily upon me because for the life of me I could not see how to get rid of it by improving my taste. And now, after all these years have gone by, I still do not know wherein it was that M. Beaussier found my taste so bad. However, his antipathy to that taste was very marked to judge from the sinister, sneering little cachinnation with which, scarce touching it with finger tips, he would turn over my paper. My spirit suffered much from these continued marks of disdain. It was plainly borne in upon me that I must eternally renounce the pursuit of glory, and count myself fortunate if I could find refuge in obscure mediocrity.

There was, however, one circumstance in all this affair from which I derived a modicum of satisfaction. I never went down to the three last places. That was not possible. That position was assured, in perpetuity, to Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal. Whatever the nature of the test, whatever the subject matter of the paper set, science, literature, languages, dead or living, no matter what, Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal were invariably at the bottom. The phenomenon recurred week by week with the constancy of those laws which regulate the courses of the stars and the orderly revolution of the seasons. True there were variations in the occupant of the penultimate place, who was sometimes Laboriette and sometimes Morlot. But the last boy was always Chazal, and we admired the tenacity

with which he maintained his position at that extremity. M. Beaussier raised no objection to a circumstance of such satisfying and ineluctable punctuality. He bowed his head to Necessity, mistress alike of mortals and of gods, and he finished his list with the names of Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal without superfluous comment. In case of defeat, Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal were, if I may so put it, always there to cover my rear. Nor was this guarantee superfluous. It was indeed of daily increasing necessity, for I had an innate tendency to descend; a secret and malign influence inclined me towards the lower strata. How could I conceal it from myself when M. Beaussier proclaimed it with the grim delight of the upright soul applauding the pitiless exactions of Justice; when my mother, wounded in her tenderest spot, bewailed it during meals, which her reproaches made bitter in my mouth; when my father maintained a reproofing silence; and when Justine herself, losing all respect for her little master, held up to him the example of her brother Symphorien, who, when he was quite a little fellow, carried off all the prizes at the Church school? I grew sad at this progressive deterioration and sought in vain for its cause, it never dawning upon me to ascribe it to the fact that I took no account of what was said and done in class. One Saturday, in December, I found myself placed in Greek composition (Ye deathless Muses, chaste sisterhood, O Mnemosyne¹ pluck from the memory

this rooted sorrow) immediately above Morlot, Laboriette and Chazal, thrust in between Morlot whom I beat by the mere force of circumstances, and Mouron whom I could not endure, and who got the better of me by a fatality that always astonished me. I had a profound contempt for Mouron, Jacques Mouron, little Mouron, whom we called Mouron *pour les petits-oiseaux* for we were witty fellows.¹ I thought he was stupid, and the sequel of my narrative will show whether I was right. I thought he had even less in him than Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal. Chazal was a rustic and sometimes astonished us by the gleeful innocence of his repartees. Laboriette, squint-eyed, wild-looking, and given to bellowing, looked like a madman. Morlot, who was always asleep, had long silky eyelashes, and resembled an enchanted prince in the *Arabian Nights*. Each had something of interest about him. But Mouron struck me as being wholly unengaging, and I believe that my comrades' views did not differ from my own. Undersized, puny, weakly, forever having something the matter with him, he had missed dozens of classes, and his numerous illnesses had dug deep trenches of ignorance in his classical knowledge. He was slow of understanding, slow at learning by heart, and too simple a soul to attempt to dissemble the poverty of his intellectual wardrobe. We took him to be ugly

¹ Chickweed (mouron) for little birds. It is impossible to render the pun in English.

because he was weak, stupid because he was shy, and contemptible because he was inoffensive. Nevertheless there was something secret, mysterious, and profound about Mouron that ought to have made us reflect and suspend our judgment. But the onrush of our folly carried us away, and it became a habit with us to tease and bully Mouron. I, too, used to laugh at Mouron, for in those days I entertained a blind respect for custom. Had I continued on the same lines I should have foregone much happiness, but I should have got on in the world. I despised Mouron, I compelled myself to depreciate and condemn him; wherein I was more foolish and more blameworthy than any of the others, if there did not exist between Mouron and myself that natural antipathy which sundered him alike from his fellows and his masters. At all events I was sincere. In all good faith I looked on Mouron as a being far inferior to myself, of an absolute and degrading inferiority, and I showed him all the disdain, all the irony that my native gentleness and my chronic thoughtlessness left at my disposal.

M. Beaussier, I proclaim it, and his deeds speak louder than my words, M. Beaussier was a just man. Maybe his Themis was devoid of illumination and grace, but she kept his scales of justice even. The singular circumstance that I am about to relate proves that M. Beaussier's judgments were influenced neither by love nor hate and that, occasionally, the verdict he had to pronounce caused him

acute pain. This then is what happened. One Saturday, a strange Saturday it was, M. Beaussier gave out that I had come out top in Latin composition. He made the announcement in a grave voice, with an air of sadness and profound dejection. He gave the impression that the thing was annoying, that it was regrettable, that it was immoral. But at any rate he announced it, he proclaimed it, and that very place in which it pained him to see me installed, he himself ordained that I should occupy. The composition, it appears, was difficult. The cleverest had gone astray in several passages. They had sought and found not. But my very heedlessness had been my best friend. As was usual with me, I had gone straight ahead without thinking at all. And, not perceiving the difficulties in my path, I had surmounted them all. Such, at all events, was the wide solution hazarded by M. Beaussier of this inexplicable circumstance. Whatever the explanation, I had come out top, I had beaten Radel, Laperlière, and Maurisset.

I had come out top! I loved glory, but I was not made for it, and mine I did not bear becomingly. Its first ray had struck me with such unlooked-for suddenness that my brain was overheated by it. I became puffed up. By a monstrous aberration of reason, I found it natural for me to be head of my class, whereas, in reality, it was contrary to rules and all imaginable probabilities. Suddenly the thought occurred to me that I should be invited

to the banquet on St. Charlemagne's Day, and that I should take my place among the great and the mighty, among the heads of all the classes from the Third to which I belonged, up to the very highest in rhetoric and mathematics. What triumph, what ecstasy! The banquet of St. Charlemagne was not merely an illustrious affair, it was a priceless gaudy. I had heard all about it from an old boy. You had creams and ices; you quaffed champagne out of crystal goblets. I gave myself airs that were extremely ridiculous, and that put me morally a long way beneath Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal. And when Mouron, little Mouron, stopped drawing roses in his exercise book and turned to look at me, and wreathed his pallid lips, which disclosed his yellow teeth, into a smile half good-humoured and half ironic, I pretended not to see so insignificant a personage. And I whispered into the ear of my neighbour Noufflard, "What a duffer this little beggar Mouron is!"

When the bell went, I imitated as I went out of the room the lumbering tread, the bovine gait of my temporarily vanquished but still haughty and menacing rivals, Radel, Laperlière, and Maurisset.

Alas, my victory was not destined to be repeated. The following week M. Beaussier, with visible satisfaction, proclaimed my downfall. The faultiness of my exercise, the solecisms and the barbarisms with which it was loaded, suddenly plunged me back again into the nethermost third of the class,

not far removed from Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal. They were possessed, those three, of the divine attributes of permanence and stability. Taking it for all in all, and unfortunately for me, my solitary attainment of that proud eminence did but add to my mediocrity the imprint of degradation. All the same, it secured me a place at the St. Charlemagne banquet.

My ideas of this banquet grew ever grander and grander. I will not go so far as to say that I thought it was going to be like the feast of the gods painted by Raphael on one of the ceilings in the Farnesian Palace, and that for a variety of reasons which I need not here specify; but I invested it with all the circumstances of pomp and magnificence which my young and frail but already ornate imagination was capable of conceiving. It was the subject on which I most frequently dwelt in my meditations, as I should have dwelt on it in my conversations, only I did not like to speak of it to my father, of whose cold reasoning I stood in awe, nor to my mother, who would certainly have told me I was undeserving of the honour of that table, since to be first once and once only is to be first by a fluke. But I talked about it in the kitchen with Justine, and told her one day, while the potatoes were frying with a great deal of hissing and sputtering, that at the St. Charlemagne dinner they served up peacocks with their tails outspread, a stag with his antlers, and young wild boars in their silken hide. That was no lie; I

had come across these festal splendours in a book of tales of olden days, and I persuaded myself that they would be reproduced and on a larger scale at the banquet of the 28th January. But Justine took no notice of me, and fell to stirring the fire with such a dreadful clatter that my father, whose study was at the other end of the house, was nearly startled out of his easy chair.

Meanwhile Mouron, le petit Mouron, the gentle, the modest Mouron, shy as ever and still a little slow in ideas, was creeping up every week; one day he even managed to get between Laperlière and Maurisset, to the amazement of every one, including M. Beaussier himself. This success was but the presage of one greater still. In the second week in January, Mouron was first in Greek composition. He had beaten Laperlière and Radel in the employment of the *iota subscript*, and displayed a better knowledge of the verbs in μ than Maurisset himself. The whole class hailed the success of Mouron with a joyous imitation of a choir of little birds, to show honour to him who bore the name of their favourite plant; and these woodland notes, hymning the hero of the verbs in μ made even M. Beaussier permit himself a smile which, by drawing back his lips, gave him the aspect of an elderly faun. It is even said that, amid the snow-laden branches, the sparrows mingled their chirruping with the voices of their imitators. As for me, to my shame I confess it, remembering that Mouron would be invited

to the St. Charlemagne banquet, I felt a pang of keen vexation. To have Mouron as a sharer of my glory displeased me mightily, and I looked no more for honour and delight from a feast where I should be seated at his side. These I freely confess were my feelings, yet, withal, I would ask, like Jean Jacques Rousseau, whether among my readers there is one who deems himself better than I. That day, when I displayed such weakness and vanity of heart, my pride was sorely humbled. M. Beaussier gave out that, in all that appertained to the aorist, my ignorance was of the crassest description, and that I had made more blunders in my Greek exercise than anyone except Morlot, Laboriette, and Chazal.

I went home in high dudgeon, and hurried off to the kitchen to see Justine, whom I discovered peeling carrots with a terrifying knife. Her bare arms were striated to bleeding point with scratches, cuts, lacerations, and all manner of abrasions. The redness of her cheeks was as brilliant as the glow of the kitchen fire. I told her that the St. Charlemagne affair was nothing but a dinner for silly asses, fat-heads, and low down curs; that they didn't give you peacocks, venison, or boar, but boiled cod and haricots. I addressed myself to the task of proving to her that Mouron pour-les-petits-oiseaux had about as much brains as a stewpot. While I was addressing her she lifted up the saucepan lid, and then, blinded by the scalding steam, seized a handful of salt from the chimney-piece, upset a bottle of oil

on her head, came into violent collision with the table, overturned the lamp, and fell sprawling at full length on the clattering tiles. Such misadventures occurred too often for her to pay much heed to them, but it was difficult to carry on a connected conversation with a person liable to such sudden ups and downs.

St. Charlemagne's Day dawned damp and dreary. The banquet was to take place in the College refectory. I had never been in it, but the stale, greasy smell that smote my nostrils as I passed by used to make me feel sick. Justine said I had a delicate stomach. The Great Hall, furnished with long tables with black marble tops, was decorated with paper festoons in the bright and simple style associated with barracks and church rooms. There were no table-cloths, but the napkins on the plates were folded in the shape of birds, and these white simulacra pleased me as much as if Aphrodite's doves had flitted through my dreams. I was put between Laperlière, who was on my right, and Mouron, who was seated at the end of the table on my left, at the foot of the platform on which the Principal, the Abbé Delalobe, shone smiling and venerable amid a black circle of professors. I snubbed Mouron; Laperlière snubbed me. None of the three of us spoke a word to each other. Laperlière could talk, if he liked, to Radel, his right-hand neighbour, but we, Mouron and I, were condemned to maintain a mutual silence. Nor peacocks, nor stags, nor boars

were brought to table, but, after a long wait, radishes and slices of sausage were handed round. I contemplated the professorial group. M. Beaussier looked blooming. I recognized his sinuous lips, his bushy pepper-and-salt whiskers, his freshly shaven chin. He appeared less at his ease than when he was in class. He fixed his napkin under his chin and conveyed the food to his mouth. I felt surprised. It had never occurred to me that he was in the habit of eating. And yet I might have imagined as much. But we don't think of all the functions of life when we look at people. We are gifted with an eliminative faculty which is of high importance for the maintenance of human dignity. The courses followed one another in slow succession. The buzz of conversation lent gaiety to the room. I could hear my left-hand neighbour Laperlière explaining to Radel the mechanism of the revolvers and rifles he had had given him for the New Year, for these princes of study were heroic even in their sports. I could not hear Radel quite so well; he was talking about horse riding—ay, and hunting to boot! It was quite impossible for me, the son of a little local doctor, to take part in such conversations, even if I had not been expressly excluded therefrom. Mouron, however, made me little tentative advances every now and again, but I waved them away with an affected air, and showed him the same hauteur as Radel and Laperlière showed me. Taking a side-long glance at his gentle, delicate little face, I hard-

ened myself in the resolve to hold no converse with a being of a lower plane. Howbeit there was some influence mysterious and profound at work within me which gave me warning that my present feelings were doomed to swift extinction and that others would be kindled in their stead. I endeavoured to stifle these secret intimations which, in ancient times, a man would have taken for a warning from the gods. After the roast, when, as Homer says, we had satisfied our inexorable hunger, the din of talking and laughter grew deafening. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Mouron roll his napkin round his right arm, leaving bare the fist, to which he gave the appearance of a face by passing the end of his thumb between his index and middle fingers. I saw him contemplate this live doll with an affected but lifelike look of sadness, and this is what I heard him saying to himself:

“How are you getting on, my poor little Mouron? You’ve got no one to talk to. That’s sad; but never mind, we’ll have a chat together, you and I, and that will amuse us famously. I will tell you of an extraordinary thing that has happened to Pierre Nozière. Pierre Nozière came to the banquet of St. Charlemagne without his soul, for, if he had had it with him, he would have talked. But he says nothing because his soul is not in his body. Where can it be? In what country? On the earth, or in the moon? I cannot tell. And while it goes a-wandering God knows whither, ’tis a sorry repast

whereof you are partaking, my poor little Mouron, sitting here beside a soulless body, a waxen statue that neither speaks nor laughs. What do you say about it, poor little Mouron—poor little Mouron-pour-les-petits-oiseaux?”

When this little comedy began I fortified myself with disdain, the better to resist my neighbour's advances, but the gentleness of his voice, the grace of the thoughts it uttered, the charm of his sweet and plaintive soul, wrought upon my heart, and behold! it was softened. Of a sudden I felt that Mouron was overcoming me by the rarest and most precious gifts of mind and character, and all at once I felt within me the glow of the tenderest affection. I could not find a word to say, but he read within my heart, and I saw his fine features light up with a smile of joy. In a single second we had become intimate friends: we had told each other all. I knew Mouron as if I had never left him for a single day. Mouron-pour-les-petits-oiseaux, Jacques Mouron, my beloved Mouron, lived with his mother and sister in a pretty little flat in the Rue de Seine. The furniture was upholstered in pink and blue plush. His father, Philippe Mouron, Professor of Chemistry at the École Normale, had died young—on the eve of making some important discoveries. Jacques Mouron, too, would have liked to take up Science. “There's some very pretty work in some of its branches, I assure you; but I don't think I should make much of a success of it. I am not

strong enough. I have been very bad again this year."

"It's nothing serious?" I asked.

"No, it's not serious," he replied, a smile playing about his pallid lips. "My sister has been ill too; she missed three months' schooling. In grammar she missed the participles, and in history the feudal system. What bad luck, wasn't it?"

"I like history," I said, "especially when it's extraordinary."

"So do I; I'm awfully fond of it. But I feel lost among the different empires and monarchies. Perhaps it's because I'm such a midget."

"But you're not a midget."

"But I'm getting so. It's a fact; I'm dwindling. I shall soon be so small you won't see me!"

The dinner was really very fine. There were *œufs à la neige* served in big salad bowls, and they gave us champagne. We became very merry. Laperlière himself condescended to drink with me, and a score of times I jogged glasses with my beloved Mouron. I told him the story of the porter's wife, who flung a bucket of water in her master's face thinking she was throwing it at some ragamuffin who kept ringing the bell and running away. And then he told me with much laughter, interrupted from time to time by a little dry cough, the story of the baked chestnut man who beheld his stove, which some one had attached by a thread to the wheel of a fiacre, unaccountably take its departure. Then he

drank to Spartacus, Epaminondas, and General Hoche. As for Charlemagne, we considered him somewhat ludicrous on account of his big beard.

"You know," said Mouron, "he went to fight the Normans with twenty thousand Franks."

I fancy we were rather drunk. Anyhow it is an undeniable fact that I took my napkin away with me from the banquet, having stuffed it into my pocket by mistake.

I went with Mouron as far as his house, where, pressing his little hot hand in mine, I promised him my undying friendship. I kept that vow as long as he lived. He died at twenty.

CHAPTER VIII

ROMANTICISM



ONE of the queerest and quaintest of the men who used to visit our house in the days when I was nearing the end of my twelfth year was M. Marc Ribert. He was a little, dark personage of about fifty or fifty-five, who, with his hair brushed up on end, his prominent forehead and sunken cheeks, contrived to give himself a tragic and desperate air. It is true that his efforts in that direction were seconded by the state of his finances, for it was said that, through his own fault, he was in exceedingly straitened circumstances. He was the son of a wealthy wine merchant at Bercy, and in his young days he had been mixed up a great deal with the literary group known as *les Jeunes France*. Addicted to the society of "pretty ladies," he had been a great frequenter of the boulevard theatres, had entertained on a lavish scale, built a gewgaw Gothic castle at Clamart, and frittered away his patrimony on all manner of extravagances. His wife, who died young, of the disease which in those days was still called consumption, had left him

with a daughter who was said to combine exquisite beauty with delicate health. He had postponed too long the reduction of his style of living, and he was believed to be at the end of his tether. It will therefore be seen that he had plenty of causes for anxiety and sorrow, but people who, like my father, knew him well, regarded him as a feather-brained, frivolous, shallow-minded man, and thought that, insensible to his all too real misfortunes, he was led by taste and inclination to pose as the victim of the Fates. He was a double-dyed Romantic. Few of his kidney were left in those days. And so M. Ribert inspired me with great admiration. His mode of speech, the expression of his face, the way he bore himself were all eloquent of his visionary genius. It seemed to me as though he were surrounded by a throng of sylphs, gnomes, angels, demons, and fairies. You ought to have heard him recite some of his mystic runes and fantastic ballads. He held that ugliness was beauty, and beauty ugliness, and I unhesitatingly believed him. Nowadays I should not be so easily convinced. M. Marc Ribert taught me that Racine was out of date and a back number. I blindly embraced this opinion because it contradicted that of my professor, M. Bonhomme. That, for me, was quite decisive. Ah, with what fire the old Romantic conjured me to strike terror into the common herd, the Philistine mob, and to lay low the hydra of formalism! With what ardour I burned to follow him, and to proclaim

the emancipation of art over the prostrate body of M. Bonhomme.

My dear mother deplored the ascendancy that M. Ribert was gaining over my mind, and sometimes she would say with a sigh: "He will make Pierre as mad as he is himself." And she counted on M. Danquin, my godfather, to counteract this evil influence. But there was little likelihood that M. Danquin would exert any effect on me, for he was a sensible man; his actions were dictated by reason. That excellent person looked upon M. Ribert as a madman, a stark staring madman, a candidate for a straitjacket. Between ourselves he believed, like M. Duvergier de Hauranne, that romanticism is a disease, like somnambulism or epilepsy, and he gave thanks to Heaven that the evil was at last dying down.

On the other hand, the antipathy with which my godfather inspired M. Marc Ribert was invincible because it was natural. In Marc Ribert's eyes my godfather was a bourgeois. "Bourgeois!" The word conveyed all. In order to distinguish himself from that ignoble caste, Marc Ribert used to attire himself in a kind of black velvet doublet and long stockings of an unusual pattern. He wore his hair long and, being flung back over his head, it formed a little Satanic point in the centre of his forehead. He also trimmed his beard like Mephistopheles. Thus rigged out he bitterly chaffed my godfather who, stumpy and pot-bellied, wearing a long frock-

coat, his nose bestraddled with gold spectacles like M. Joseph Prudhomme, also adorned himself, like that worthy, with a collar that came well up over his cheeks, and a black silk tie wound three times round his neck; and as his cheeks were of the most beautiful vermilion, Marc Ribert used to compare my godfather's face, in its enormous collar, to a bunch of roses wrapped round with white paper. I was struck with the aptness of the comparison which, coming into my mind every time I saw my godfather, sent me off into fits of laughter. Thereat my godfather, who could not quite make it out but had his suspicions, shrugged his shoulders, called me a great dolt, and told me I had better go and learn my lessons, instead of acting the buffoon. M. Marc Ribert, on the other hand, advised me not to listen to my professors.

"They're a lot of old dummies," he said, "a parcel of Fontanes," adding with what appeared to me a very happy play upon the words: "Yes Fontanes, *faciunt asinos!*"¹

Times without number I have heard arguments going on in our little drawing-room between my godfather and M. Ribert. My godfather would play the part of Jérôme Paturot to the life. I was not capable of following the discussion, still less of weighing the arguments adduced by one disputant or the other, if, that is to say, any reasons were

¹ The pun (Fontanes and *font ânes*: they make asses) cannot be reproduced in English.

adduced at all. I was only a little muff, and being a muff, I was very decided in my opinions. I was always against my godfather. The fact is, he did not employ a dazzling vocabulary like his antagonist, who would hurl at you, pell-mell, hauberks, scarps, crests, giants, dragons, squires, dwarfs, chatelaines, pages, chantries, hermits. At the sound of his voice, Madame Nozière's little drawing-room faded away, giving place to an enchanted world, and amid this shadowy scene, the voice of the old Romantic would break out into curses, gibes, and guttural guffaws.

How thin and piping in comparison were the tones of my godfather who would respond with *The King of Yvetot* or *The Careless Miller* as his seals swung to and fro on his little round stomach.

It would be beyond my power to give a full and faithful record of their conversations. And I dare say it is the most important part of them that has escaped me. If I try to call to mind some of their remarks, it seems to me that Monsieur Danquin may not always have been as wrong as I used to believe. He was wont to complain that the niceties of speech, the finer shades and delicate distinctions of meaning, once so carefully observed and noted, were now obscured and obliterated, and that people did not write so well or so clearly as they used to do. He also lamented that Reason had lost its empire over men's minds. But M. Marc Ribert had this inestimable advantage over his adversary:

his thoughts were difficult to understand; their obscurity rendered them beautiful in my eyes. We seldom admire the things that are clear to us. There is no admiration without the element of surprise. And so I was carried away with enthusiasm as I heard M. Ribert unfold the mission of the Romantics.

"They are called," said he, "to fulfil a task of revolt and suffering. Theirs is the cruel anguish of fevered striving for the Infinite; despair concealed beneath a mask of the bitterest irony," and so on, at great length. I shuddered with delight and trepidation.

The political discussions that took place between these two men, so divergent in disposition and mental outlook, were as heated as their literary arguments, but they were much shorter. In the world of politics there was only one name that carried weight with my godfather, and that was Napoleon. M. Ribert's hero was Louis le Hutin. It was in the reign of Louis le Hutin that he would fain have lived, as he called all the saints to witness. My godfather thought he was joking. That was a great error. M. Ribert never joked, and the earnestness which he maintained in the midst of his madness, gave him great authority over the mind of a child like myself. The idea that it would have been good to live in the reign of Louis le Hutin took such a hold on my mind, that I was forever proclaiming

it to my mother, to Justine, and to the other boys in my class.

One day, during midday recreation, I imparted my conviction to Fontanet who, being of a more judicious and loftier turn of mind than I, answered that for his part, he would like to have lived in the reign of St. Louis.

I had never been to M. Marc Ribert's house, though I had known him for a long time, when one morning my father, who was going there, either professionally or to make a friendly call, took me with him. M. Ribert lived on the right bank of the Seine, in the Rue Duphot close by the Madeleine. There was nothing romantic about the street or the house. It dated back not to Louis le Hutin, but to Louis Philippe. The stairs, with their drab carpet and cast-iron white painted bannisters, were not at all in keeping with the tastes of M. Ribert. The lobby, containing a hat rack and an umbrella stand, harmonized with them just as little. But stay a moment, please. My father, leaving me alone, slipped down a passage which doubtless led to M. Ribert's sleeping apartment, and the serving wench, well covered with fat in every sense of that phrase, conducted me into a little drawing-room furnished with couches whereon were heaped embroidered cushions and oriental tapestries. On the wall there hung a very big picture which, as I looked upon it, suddenly made me conscious of the spell that grief can cast over the mind of man. But grief is

more moving to generous hearts when it is associated with beauty. I was deeply touched at the sight of this painting, which represented Ophelia, charming in her pale, fragile loveliness, sinking to death with a smile on her lips. She lay reclined unresistingly upon the water, gently upstayed by her garments. Her head, with its wreath of grasses and flowers, rested on the stream as though upon a pillow. From the brook and its fringing trees came a pale greenish light that cast its faint gleam over the maiden's features. Her eyes expressed the childish wonder of the stricken brain. As I stood gazing at this picture, so full of grace and pity, I heard a clear young voice singing, but with strange wanderings and sudden interruptions, *Adieu, mon beau navire!* That song, which at any other moment would perhaps have left me unmoved, went straight to my heart, and I burst into a flood of tears. Then the song ceased. But I was still tremulous with emotion. The sound of an opening door made me turn my head and, in the shadow of the doorway, I beheld a young girl arrayed in white like Ophelia; with fair tresses like hers and, like her, bearing an armful of flowers. At the sight of me she gave a faint cry and fled away. For days afterwards, how many I know not, there came again before my eyes the vision of Ophelia and of that young girl who so closely resembled her, and I read and read so often that I got to know it by heart, the tale told by the Queen, in Shakespeare's play:

"There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes
As one incapable of her own distress."

Some days, or it may have been weeks, after my visit to the house in the Rue Duphot, where I had experienced such profound emotion, I heard my parents say, among the various matters they talked about at table, that M. Marc Ribert had definitely left Paris, as he could no longer afford to live there, and that he had retired to a little village on the Gironde, where he was living with some relations who owned a vineyard in that region. He had taken with him his daughter, whose health had been giving rise to some anxiety. The news caused me some distress but no surprise. I was prepared to hear of great misfortunes in that quarter.

Time slipped by. Insensibly, like the beauteous form of Hamlet's beloved, the image of the flower-bearing maiden faded from my memory. Then, of a

sudden, I bethought myself of her again one autumn morning as I heard my dear mother singing *Adieu, mon petit navire*.

"Mother," I asked, "what has become of M. Marc Ribert? It is more than five years since I heard anything of him or his daughter."

"Monsieur Marc Ribert is dead, my dear. How comes it that you did not know that? His daughter has gone mad, but she is quite harmless. She has a box full of stones which she treasures most carefully, for she thinks they are pearls and diamonds. She shows them to people to admire, and gives them to the visitors that come to see her. Some of her delusions are still more singular. She says she cannot read because, when she opens a book, she can scarcely look at a page before the letters begin to flit about the room, buzzing like flies; so she will read nothing but bouquets. She can easily decipher their meaning, for she knows the language of flowers. But now, alas! when she looks at them, the flowers too take wing like butterflies."

"What sent her off her head—do they know?"

"An unhappy love affair. Bérengère was engaged to be married. When the man heard that her father had lost all his money, including his daughter's little fortune, he broke off the engagement."

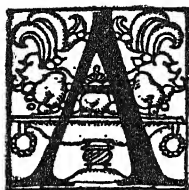
I said it was a shame. My mother smiled sadly.

"Men, my dear," she said, "are often devoid of courage and of faith."

The thought impressed me. Though there was nothing recondite about it, it was a singular thing for my mother to say, for she was a believer in human kindness.

CHAPTER IX

DAYS OF ENCHANTMENT



LITTLE while after that something happened which marked an epoch in my life: I went to my first play. My parents were no great theatre-goers, and for them to take me to the theatre an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances was required. It was necessary that my father, by his skill and attention, should cure a certain playwright's wife of a dangerous illness, and that, shortly afterwards, that playwright should be having one of his pieces, an historical drama, enacted at the Porte-Saint-Martin; then it was further necessary that the grateful husband should offer my father a box, available for the one and only night in the week on which I could be allowed to stay up late, which meant Saturday—not a day when theatrical managers are lavish of their favours as a rule; and, finally, it was necessary that the play should be of such a nature as would bring no offence to innocent ears. For twenty-four hours I lived torn betwixt hope and fear, devoured by fever, awaiting this undreamt-of felicity which any sudden blow of fate might utterly destroy. I was on thorns

up to the last minute lest the doctor should suddenly be called away to a case. When the day came I thought the sun would never set. The dinner, of which I did not eat a mouthful, seemed interminable, and I was in mortal terror lest we should arrive late. My mother seemed as if she would never finish dressing. She was afraid of missing the beginning, and so offending the author, and yet she wasted the all too precious time in arranging the flowers in her bodice and in her hair. My mother stood before the glass of her wardrobe studying her white muslin dress, over which she was wearing a transparent tunic with green spots, and she seemed to attach a serious importance to the way her hair was done, to the arrangement of her tippet, to the hang of the lace on her short sleeves, and to various other details of her toilet which, to me, seemed utterly trivial. I have since modified that opinion. Justine had been to fetch a fiacre, and it was waiting at the door. Mother sprinkled some lavender water on her handkerchief, and came downstairs. When she got to the bottom she found she had left her smelling-salts on the dressing table, and sent me up to fetch them. At last we reached the theatre. The attendant showed us into a box that was red all over. It looked out on to an immense hall buzzing like a hive of bees, whence there arose the discordant sounds of the instruments which the musicians were tuning up. There was something tremendously solemn about the three raps on the stage and the

dead silence that followed. When the curtain went up it was really like going from one world to another. And how splendid was the one into which I was passing. Peopled by knights and pages, dames and damozels of high degree, life was on a broader and grander scale than in the world into which I had been born; passions were more terrible there, and beauty more beautiful. In those spacious Gothic halls the dresses, the gestures, the voices of those who moved therein charmed the senses, dazzled the brain, and captivated the heart. From that moment nothing existed for me save that enchanted world thus suddenly opened to my curious and adoring gaze. An irresistible illusion had taken hold of me, and things that might well have destroyed it by reminding me that it was all only theatrical make-believe, such as the boards, the friezes, the strips of painted canvas that represented the sky, the curtain that framed the stage, all combined to hold me more closely than ever in the magic circle. The play took me back to the later years of the reign of Charles VII, and not one of the characters that came upon the scene, not even the night watchman or the sergeant of the guard but left a vivid impression on my mind. But when Margaret of Scotland appeared I became extraordinarily excited. I felt burning hot and icy cold at the same time, and I almost fainted away. I loved her. She was beautiful. Never would I have believed that mortal woman could be so lovely. She looked pale and

melancholy in the subdued light. The moon, which was immediately recognizable as a medieval moon by reason of the procession of gloomy clouds that accompanied it, and by its obvious predilection for church towers, poured down its silver beams upon the youthful princess. In the riot of memories that come thronging in upon me, I know not what sequence to keep or how to finish off my story. I marvelled that Margaret was so white, and, perceiving that she had blue eyelashes, I deemed it a sign of noble birth. Wedded to Louis the Dauphin, she loves Raoul, the young and handsome archer. He knows neither father nor mother—a circumstance which makes him exceeding sad. None dare blame the princess for loving Raoul the archer, when they know that that same archer is a son of Charles VII. The King, having been warned by the astrol-ogers that he would meet his death at the hands of his son, causes him to be left naked as soon as he was born, and substitutes for him a foundling who marries Margaret of Scotland, and becomes the Dauphin Louis. Thus it was for Raoul that Margaret was really destined. She knows it not, nor does Raoul, but a mysterious power draws them one to the other.

The intervals between the acts brought me rudely back to the work-a-day world. They struck me as being detestably coarse, and the shouts of "chocolates, lemonade, bottled ale," though new to my ears

and consequently devoid of commonness, wounded me by reason of their profane character.

I observed from the programme that the rôle of Margaret of Scotland was sustained by Mademoiselle Isabelle Constant, a name which was graven in my heart in characters of fire. I still had sense enough left to distinguish between the part and its interpreters, but I ascribed to Mademoiselle Constant the character of Margaret of Scotland as the playwright had expressed it, the same love of letters, the same pure and magnanimous soul, the same noble heart, the same romantic melancholy.

During the last interval, the author, a tall man with a pimply face and hair turning grey, came into our box, and I saw him bow politely to my mother. He laid his hand on my head as Rachel once did, he talked to me kindly about my work at school, he congratulated me on being so fond of literature at my age, and he exhorted me to make a thorough study of Latin. He knew Latin himself, he said, and that was why his style was so different from his fellow dramatists', who wrote like hacks. But all these condescensions were in vain. I answered hardly a word, and never looked at him at all. Had he known the cause of my indifference, he would have felt flattered, but he probably thought me stupid, never dreaming that my stupidity was due to the prodigious impression his work had made on me. The curtain went up again. Once more I began to live. Margaret of Scotland was

restored to me. Alack, I had found her only to lose her again forthwith. She perished at the hand of the Dauphin Louis just as the archer Raoul was casting himself at her feet. The archer Raoul fell stabbed by the same dagger and learnt, as he breathed his last, that he was loved. How I envied his lot!

With what disdain at morning school on the Monday did I look upon my professor who was endeavouring to drive home the importance of realizing the distinction between the three voices of the Greek verb, as though anything in the world mattered, apart from Mademoiselle Isabelle Constant, her glory and her beauty. As I contemplated the adorable image engraven on my heart, I never listened to a word of what M. Beaussier was telling the class about the middle voice, which is not merely reflective as is too commonly supposed. This inattentiveness on my part made it impossible for me to make up my mind, when called upon to do so by my professor, whether *παρῶκεθέσθαι* means to *present oneself* or to *present for oneself*, two obviously different things. Instead of making a guess at it, which would have given me one chance in two of answering correctly, I sat like a fool and said nothing, whereupon he called me a loon, an insult which rankled grievously within me, for love puts a man on his mettle.

During recreation I gave a full account of the evening which had sealed my fate, to Mouron, unto

whose exquisite soul it seemed befitting that I should impart my confidences. To my great disappointment Mouron was far from being moved to wonder and admiration. He smiled a little mocking smile all the time I was recounting my story, and when I told him about Isabelle's beauty, he was quite unaffected, and made answer with one of those aggravating little puns dear to his polyglot mind: "*Isabella bella dona*, or by contraction, *Isabella-dona*," said he. There was occasionally something petty about Mouron's way of looking at things.

That evening, as Fontanet and I, with our books under our arms, were going home as usual along the Rue du Cherche-Midi and the Rue des Saints-Pères, I could not help talking to him about the only subject which had any reality for me. Knowing my friend's ironic disposition, I was afraid he would make game of my lofty sentiments. As a matter of fact, however, he turned a grave countenance upon me, and seemed to encourage me by his silence to outpour the whole contents of my soul. Finding, contrary to all expectations, some one with whom I could hold sympathetic communion, I gave my beloved fellow scholar a full account of the state of mind into which I had been plunged by the form of Margaret of Scotland seen beneath the moon's silver ray.

Fontanet looked at me with a gloomy expression and said:

"Take care, Nozière, take care, women are deceitful things."

Then he went on with unexpected violence.

"When a man has loved a woman, when you have trodden with her the mossy carpet of the woods, when you have twined the honeysuckle in her hair, when she had plighted her troth to you beneath the linden's shade, it's awful, you see, if she goes and plays you false. There's nothing left to live for then. You no longer exist. You're nothing but a shadow, a corpse."

True, these words had no very close connection with mine, but they were instinct with the spirit of love, and we fell to singing alternate strophes like a pair of Sicilian shepherds. I derived much pleasure therefrom, and experienced not a little surprise. Néver till that day had Fontanet held forth to me on the perfidy of women, and never had he spoken in such tones of exultation. His ordinary conversation was more calculated to suggest the capable business man, and I was particularly impressed with him as a statesman. But that day Fontanet's mind was not occupied with public matters.

A prey, body and sōul, to love and all its tragic consequences, he gave utterance to the most terrible resolutions.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "to taste the delights of vengeance!"

"Would I might see her again, were it only for

a moment," said I with a sigh, "or behold her unperceived as she passed me by."

Fontanet murmured the name of Madeleine, and seemed a prey to the sublimest tortures.

"Who is Madeleine?" I asked, much moved. "Where did you get to know her?"

"Madeleine," answered Fontanet gravely, "is the heroine of a novel which is founded on fact. I read it last Sunday in the Luxembourg Gardens on a seat in front of the statue of Velléda. The novel is called *Sous les tilleuls*. You ought to read it if you want to know what passion means. I will lend it to you."

Days followed days and still I did not forget Isabelle. In what place, I wondered, did she dwell, in what delightful gardens did she wander. But I found no one who could enlighten me. I had no connections in the theatrical world. For lack of definite information I provided her with a dwelling according to my own idea of what such a dwelling should be. I gave her a fifteenth-century château, and in it I piled up all the splendours of the gorgeous East.

On Thursday, in the Rue de Tournon, I ran across my neighbour, M. Ménage. He was returning from the Luxembourg, where, in order to win his daily bread, he was copying *L'Appel des Condamnés*, a huge sentimental canvas which, he said, made him feel sick. He bewailed the decadence of the arts, vented his indignation on the Philistines, those

enemies of genius, poured forth his spleen, at great length, on the sickly paintings of Ary Scheffer, and, filled with horror and disgust at the present day and all its works, thundered anathema on bourgeois poetry, the bourgeois novel, and the bourgeois theatre. By the aid of stratagem and patience I contrived to steer the conversation back to the theatre, and I asked him whether he knew Mademoiselle Isabelle Constant.

"Ah," he cried, smiling all of a sudden, "the little Constant girl. She's the daughter of old Constant the hairdresser in the Rue Vavin. You can see his shop from here; it's painted blue, and there's a gilt ball on the top of it with a horse's tail hanging from it. In a cage, against one of the windows of the entresol, carol the canaries of the little Constant girl, whom they resemble because they look pretty, sing sweetly, and take life merrily. You ought to see Ma Constant, with poppies in her hat, her side curls tied to her ears with pieces of red string, her tortoiseshell combs, her little yellow shawl, and her work-bag. She never lets her daughter out of her sight, makes her gulp down raw eggs to improve her voice, sits herself down in the little thing's dressing-room, receives her admirers and the gentlemen of the Press, tells the theatre attendants all about Isabelle's attractions, and the various medicines she gives her, and 'takes her 'ome on the last bus.' If you want to see little Constant you can do so easily enough. Every Monday, as regular as clockwork,

her old father washes her hair with *eau de quinine*, then about four o'clock, if the weather be fine, he takes her to the Luxembourg, dumps her down on a camp stool, and smokes his pipe alongside of her while her ladyship's tresses dry in the sun."

CHAPTER X

A BARREN FRIENDSHIP



TOGETHER with Mouron and Fontanet, I formed part of a group of peripatetics who, strolling at their ease up and down the quadrangle during recreation, used to discuss all things knowable and unknowable.

Nor will the wise regard it as strange when I add that the more recondite the problems to which we addressed ourselves, the more ready of solution we found them.

Difficulties of the metaphysical order were virtually non-existent for us, and the properties of Time and Space, Mind and Matter, the Finite and the Infinite, hardly caused us any perplexity. Perhaps the problems that such matters present to the mind caused me a little more trouble than they did to my friends, a circumstance which made Fontanet somewhat sceptical as to the depth of my intelligence.

We often talked about what we were going to be, and the higher we got in the school the greater the insistency with which the question clamoured for solution. Conscious of having within him the

seeds of the disease which had carried off his father in early manhood, Mouron, to keep his mind from dwelling on the subject, formed all sorts of plans. His genuine linguistic talents seemed to mark him out for a studious and sedentary career, such as advanced educational work. Fearing, however, that his health would not permit him to undertake arduous and exacting studies, he thought of taking up a seafaring life. He also had a taste for entomology, and really surprised us with his profound acquaintance with the habits of ants.

Fontanet displayed less hesitation in deciding on a career. He resolved to go in for the Bar, and proposed to go into Parliament as soon as he reached the legal age. Bent on becoming another Berryer, our eloquent comrade was already on the lookout for some great lost cause. It was, he said, in the ranks of the vanquished that real greatness of soul displayed itself.

As for me, failing to discover any definite vocation, I resigned myself to the fulfilment of humble tasks, and in order to make my destiny fit in with my disposition, I aspired to mediocrity. But this mediocrity in material things did not extend to ideas. I aspired to see all, to know all, to feel all, to contain the whole world within me, a desire that was destined to achieve only partial fulfilment.

Chazal often came and joined us. We looked down on his boorishness of mind, but we had all to admit that, in his simple rustic fashion, he was a

good fellow. Perpetually laughed at by boys and masters alike for his old-fashioned way of speaking, his broad country accent, his ignorance of arts and letters, and his sterling good sense which always hit the mark, often belaboured despite his muscular strength of which he never took unfair advantage, Chazal held on the even tenour of his way, keeping sure possession of himself and retaining that serene gaiety whose unfailing source was within him.

Chazal loved nothing but the country; he came of a line of big landowners, and his great idea in life was to make the most of the family property. I loved the country as much as he could have loved it, but not in the same way. His love for it was the love of the industrious hard-bitten peasant. For him the country meant hard work and profit. And I, what I sought from Nature was to drink in upon her breast the delight which she mingles with death. I besought her to yield me all her passionate beauty. How little we change. As I write these lines I feel once more the thrill of my childhood days.

I had the consciousness that I was capable of friendship, and I felt a deep affection for Mouron. Following on a long period of dislike, my love for him welled up with sudden force, and Mouron's charm made our relationship a pure delight. I appreciated to the full the clear-cut delicacy of his mind and the firmness of character which went hand in hand with his gentle ways. The only danger which threatened our perfect understanding arose

from that tendency to exaggeration which has often marred my best intentions. Having misjudged him all too long, I now fell to regarding him, by way of compensation, with an excess of admiration that was wearying alike for him and for me. Nor was it merely his modesty that I was in danger of offending, but that sense of proportion, of moderation, which was at the very root of his mind and character.

I did not know that I loved Chazal, and this ignorance will appear the more incomprehensible when I add that I could never see him or hear him speak without a glow of pleasure. I felt the rustic beauty of his soul, I savoured the charm of his bucolic speech. But being a submissive slave to public opinion, which would have it that Chazal was a clodhopper, I was fool enough to think that it was my wit that added the salt to his clumsy utterances. To be quite frank, he exhaled a powerful odour of sweat. I should have preferred him to smell of violets.

With regard to Fontanet, I had known him for a very long time, and it no longer occurred to me to examine the foundations of a friendship so old that it might well be looked upon as indestructible. The admiration I evinced for his ingenious mind and, still more, the satisfaction he derived from my unquestioning simplicity, drew daily more close the bonds which united us one to the other. Fontanet, who had the profile of a fox, also possessed that animal's habits, and had it not been for his inveterate

itching to bamboozle other people, I fancy he would have chosen a less ingenuous companion than myself.

Another of the peripatetics was Savigny, a little midget of a fellow, as proud as Lucifer, who was going in for the Navy but obstinately refused to study geography on the grounds that he would learn quite enough of that subject as he sailed the seas.

Then again there was Maxime Denis who composed a Latin poem, in imitation of Ovid, on M. Mésange's metamorphosis into a bird. For such as may be ignorant of the fact, I would add that M. Mésange, our mathematical master, was doomed to carry in this transitory life an immense, amorphous body of portentous adiposity by whose iniquitous burden he was nearly crushed to the ground. This crude and inchoate mass was perpetually dripping with sweat. Moreover, it exhaled a warm, steamy mist highly agreeable to flies. Now it chanced that Nature in her thoughtlessness had furnished this monstrous trunk with a child's arms, so that it was only with difficulty that M. Mésange could keep off the winged insects which came in swarms to batten on his oleaginous cranium. And while he was instilling into us the properties of numbers, he was contemplating with envious eye the little birds as they pecked the breadcrumbs in the playground. It was therefore out of real kindness of heart that Maxime Denis sang the metamorphosis of our obese preceptor into that bee-hunting bird whose name he

bore.¹ I remember but one line of the poem. Its elegant Latinity will be admired of all:

“Versicolorque merops, apibus certissima fessis
Pernicies. . . .”

Thus, right under the suspicious eye of Pelissier the usher we carried on our interchange of ideas both grave and gay. But I was suddenly snatched away from this choice company by a wave of feeling to which I abandoned myself with singular ardour. A trifling circumstance brought the thing to pass. My father happening by chance to notice my total inability to solve certain problems in geometry that were in no wise insoluble, ascribed this incapacity on my part to ignorance of a science whose truths are arrived at by deduction one from another. In order to remedy this state of affairs, he asked M. Mésange to coach me in geometry. M. Mésange agreed and took me twice a week from half-past four to half-past five, together with another boy, Tristan Desrais, whom I knew very well, because we had been in the same form for six months past. I had had as little to do with him as possible. We had merely exchanged a word or two in the drawing class in which he showed marked inattention, whilst I was copying the head of Hersilia with the utmost care. Desrais, who was the same age and the same build as I was, looked a little younger. I hardly knew what his features were like, but his lips, which

¹ Mésange, *anglice* Tom Tit.

looked as red as if they had been painted, attracted my attention. I also observed his auburn hair, which was slightly wavy with a golden tinge about it here and there, his long eyelashes, his even complexion and his protruding ears. He would have struck one as cold and hard but for a slight smile which usually lit up his countenance. He used to bite his nails right back to the quick, which spoilt the look of his hands. Being slim and loosely knit you would not have guessed how muscular he was. All his movements were marked by an elegance which my precocious fondness for classic sculpture caused me to regard with appreciation. For the rest, his superiority in all bodily exercises was unanimously recognized, and it was as though we had an English boy in our midst. Schoolboys in those days went in very little for sport. Physical culture was unknown, and the gymnastic lessons which were given by a corporal in the Fire Brigade were very sparsely attended. The gymnasium fitted up in our playground we regarded as *infra dig*. But some games such as prisoner's base and football gave the stronger fellows a chance to show themselves off to advantage. Desrais and La Berthelière were the kings of the playground. I used to avoid these athletic games, for which I did not care, and in which I did not expect to shine. Desrais, therefore, had never in the least attracted my attention. But the very first geometry lesson we had together with our coach, I conceived a sudden liking for him.

Considered as such, these geometry lessons were not the most amazing successes in the world. M. Mésange tried to make a sorry apprentice, who would never have got across the Pons Asinorum unassisted, run in double harness with Desrais who was preparing for Saint Cyr. The lessons took place in a classroom in the big school at lunch time. Doing our best:

“De poursuivre une sphère en ces cercles nombreux
Et du sec A plus B les sentiers ténébreux,”

we drew the figures on the blackboard, swallowing with our roll and chocolate a plentiful measure of chalk dust, while, in the adjoining classroom, M. Régnier, a laureate of the Conservatoire, was giving La Berthelière and Morlot a lesson on the violin which might easily have been mistaken for a cats' concert. The penetrating charms of this music rapidly plunged M. Mésange into a profound and sonorous slumber. Thinking it unbecoming to disturb the master's repose, Desrais carried on with me a conversation which I found perfectly delightful, though I don't know why. Desrais frequently talked about his ties, making much of their shape and colour. He also told me how well he was getting on with his riding, and how he hoped that when the holidays came his mother would give him a horse. When he considered that the “coaching” had been going on long enough, he shook the powdery duster over the dominie, who, sleeping with his mouth wide

open, would wake with a start, coughing and spluttering amid a cloud of chalk.

I learned but little geometry during these lessons, but I tasted the pleasures of friendship and found them very sweet. To see Desrais, to talk and laugh with him, was a rare treat for me. Thenceforward I sought his company and joined in his games. When stilts became the go, Desrais, who always followed the fashion, got himself a pair. I followed suit and hoisted myself on a pair as tall as his, though I was in mortal fear lest I should come a cropper, an apprehension that was fully justified by my clumsiness. From this time forward I never missed a game of base or football despite the distaste I had hitherto entertained for these diversions. To do myself justice, I have always been pretty liberally inclined; what was wanting was an opportunity to give rein to my inclination. I now discovered a never failing object for my generosity. Having noticed that Desrais was fond of stationery, I gave him the handsomest notebooks that money could purchase at Madame Fuzelier's shop, notebooks bound in white linen, in black shagreen, in russet morocco, with gilt edges! I gave him a penholder made of a porcupine's quill, with a silver ball at the top, and a sharkskin pocket inkstand. Ruin was staring me in the face. My mother was astounded at my reckless finance, and my importunate demands for supplementary credits.

Though neither very thoughtful nor very indus-

trious, Desrais had a ready intelligence, and, as he knew how to make himself agreeable, he managed to ingratiate himself with the pick of the school, with the people my godfather the paleontologist used to designate the "primates." My affection for him spurred me on to follow suit, with such success that, for a time, I found myself in the same exalted atmosphere, and in my case the effort was the greater since, unlike him, I had not the gift of grace.

Being much keener on his society than he was on mine, I used to accompany him after our geometry lessons to his home in the Rue Saint Dominique. And it was out of my way. One night, on the *carrefour* of the Croix.Rouge, we met Duluc, the fire brigade corporal, our gymnastics instructor.

"Let's make him drunk," whispered Desrais.

He went up to the young soldier, who was as bashful as a girl, and dragged him, blushing all over, into a neighbouring tobacconist's where he stood him a brandy and cigarettes. And we drank his health. Desrais did not make the fireman drunk, but he made my head ache horribly. Next day he insisted on my smoking a Maryland cigarette which nearly made me bring my heart up. In short, not a day went by without my discovering fresh reasons to admire my friend.

Desrais, who came of a family of soldiers, was going in for the army. The consequence was that I forthwith discovered a leaning towards the mili-

tary profession, of which I had hitherto been unconscious. Already I beheld myself a lieutenant, nay a captain, heroic, gentle, and melancholy as a soldier of Alfred de Vigny's. Meanwhile I sought vainly for an opportunity of giving Desrais some signal mark of my devotion.

One day I read in some book or other on Greek poetry the funeral epigram of Amyntor, son of Philip, who died young in battle covering his friend with his shield. I trembled with emotion, and was carried away with the longing to give my life for Desrais.

This heroic friendship was shattered in a moment. One autumn day, during recreation, a football match was arranged, and Desrais and La Berthelière, the rival captains, were choosing their champions. Alleging that I was too weak at the game, which was too evidently the case, Desrais did not take me on his side. I broke with him at once, deeply mortified but without regret, knowing well that I should never renew the friendship. And the friend for whom, the day before, I would willingly have died, became of no account to me.

CHAPTER XI

ÆGLE

"Sanguineis frontem moris et tempora pingit."—*Virgil*,
Ecl. vi.



YOU would hardly know Pierre nowadays," said my mother; "he has become so changeable and strange. Up in the skies one moment, and the next, for no apparent reason, down in the depths."

"What he wants is plenty of air and exercise," my father replied.

Half-way through August, thinking that the country would do me good, my parents, who were unable to leave Paris, sent me to board with a grand-nephew of Madame Laroque, Isidore Gonse, a farmer at Saint Pierre, near Granville.

At that time the railway only went as far as Carentan. From that little port, where in the winding streets the weather-beaten lace-makers plied their task leaning against their ancient walls, the diligence took me on to Granville, where M. Gonse had come to meet me. After taking me to an inn on the outskirts of the town, and making me swallow two mugs

of very rough cider, which gave me a bad headache, he drove me in his trap to the village of Saint Pierre, of which he was mayor, and where he had some rich grass lands that provided him with an easy livelihood.

Ruddy of face and broad of shoulder, he displayed a great capacity for drinking and money-making. Scarcely able to read, he knew more law than his notary, and, in his broad dialect, could tell a story as well as Beroald de Verville. His wife, a little shrivelled thing, who looked older than her years, had a style about her, and both in dress and manner exhibited that nun-like air and appearance commonly found among the well-to-do peasant women of those days. Mathilde, the daughter, took after her father in the matter of health and strength; good-looking enough with her florid complexion and buxom figure, and, like her parents, a long way from being a fool. But I paid no attention to her. Shy and untamed, I only saw my host and his family at meals, which they dragged out a great deal too long for my liking. The habit of sitting over the coffee and cordial, so dear to country folk, was intolerable to me. I was eager to get away to my solitude peopled with dream faces, and to roam the countryside.

Southwards the village straggled along beside the high road, and to the north dipped down in the direction of a lake, across which the butterflies flew in couples, and a little wood with the trunks of some

fallen giants, which I loved beyond everything. Five hundred paces from this wood there rose up, surrounded by its moat where myriads of midges danced in the evening air, the Château de Saint-Pierre, in which the jackdaws had made their home. The floors had all fallen in, and the huge chimney-pieces, which still retained their position on the walls, were the only things left to mark the height of the different storeys. I went there again and again, clambering about among the ruins where the sea winds sang their endless song.

A wondrous change had come over me, and I no longer knew myself. I raced about the place, I laughed with glee, as I scraped my hide plunging through the bramble hedges. Hitherto I had not been very sure of foot, but now I climbed trees like a cat, and spent whole days sitting motionless and lost to the world reclining among the hard and glorious limbs which the giant spread aloft to the sky, or else, plunging deeper in the wood, I stretched myself out on the mossy carpet and slumbered to diapason of the wind in the trees.

One morning I walked to Granville, which was about six miles from Saint Pierre. The sky was stormy, and the clouds were driving low. There was a strong smell of the sea, and, breasting the fresh, salt-laden breeze, I strode along the promenade where, almost a century before, Madame Laroque, then a young and pretty girl, had bloomed like an apple tree. I contemplated the old walls

into which the Chouans had thrust their bayonets to make themselves footholds that they might climb up and storm the town. Leaning over the parapet, I gazed long at the dun-coloured rocks, at the beach with its dark patches of seaweed where the breakers left a creamy foam whose flakes were caught up and blown away by the wind, at the horizon more desolate and mournful than anything old Homer tells us of the shores of the Cimmerians.

Then my heart, full to overflowing of sadness and unrest, could contain itself no longer. I fell to weeping, and was fain to die, not from lassitude and weariness of living, but because Life seemed too full of beauty and charm not to make me also in love with Death, her twin sister and her friend, with whom she dwells eternally entwined; and because I cherished Nature so fondly that I longed to seek annihilation and oblivion within her folding arms. Never had life been so dear to me. I filled my lungs with the warm, scented air, the evening breezes wafted caresses sweeter than any I had ever before known, and I was thrilled to the deeps of my soul.

Thinking that I found the time heavy, Gonse lent me an old gun, and told me to go and do a little shooting if I could find anything to shoot at. I went and practised on the daws that nested in the masonry of the old château. I brought one of them down: I saw it fall, with broken wing. One of its feathers floated slowly down after it. At the same moment all those beautiful birds of the ruined

château wheeled round and round above my head uttering shrill cries that pierced my ears like curses. I fled away in terror, horror-stricken at what I had done. I vowed that never again would I slay another creature of the air or the woods.

I took a Virgil which I had put into my kitbag, and read and read it over and over again, chanting it to myself with tears and thrills of admiration. These days of wild unrest were followed by days of torpor.

One hot afternoon I was sleeping in my wood under the leaves through which the sunlight pierced with arrows of gold, when I was awakened by the touch of a hand upon my face. It was my host's daughter, Mademoiselle Mathilde, who was squashing mulberries on my cheeks and temples, imitating, though she knew it not, Ægle, the fairest of the Naiads, who smeared with the same purple juice the face of Silenus as he lay asleep. But Mathilde Gonse, knowing well that I was no genius, asked not of me, as did Ægle of the divine Silenus, that I should sing her one of those songs that charm the hearts of shepherds, fauns, and all wild creatures. Without waiting for me to rouse myself, she sped away, flinging a little mocking laugh at me over her shoulder as she ran.

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CHAPTER XII

MATRICULATION



WHEN still quite young M. Dubois consecrated his life to Literature and the Arts. He learnt Greek in order that he might read Homer in the original, and took lessons of the illustrious Clavier. When I knew him he was an ardent lover of classical art and poetry, and did his best to make me love them too. Sometimes, as I was turning the pages of my book, he would lean over me and give me some valuable lessons that I cannot recall without thinking of that group so often reproduced which portrays the musical Satyr teaching a young Faun how to play the syrinx:

*"Il m'instruisit ma main, jeune et débile encore
A boucher tour à tour les trous du buis sonore."*

M. Dubois, who was imbued with Winckelmann, lent me the works of that illustrious antiquary, thereby making my mother deeply anxious, for she feared, not without reason, that the big quartos over which I pored till I began to lose my colour, would

make me neglect my homework. Neglect it in truth I did. When I compared M. Dubois, his pure and lofty tastes, his broad intellectual outlook, with my own master, who was a very worthy man and perfectly straightforward, but who lacked the feeling for poetry and the spirit of art, I certainly did neglect, to my serious undoing, a course of instruction that was arid and devoid of charm, and of which I failed to recognize the advantages. Moreover, everything at school made study hateful and life unbearable. I could never accustom myself to the degrading system of rewards and punishments which debases the character and distorts the judgment. I have always held that to create emulation is to stir up the children one against another. But what, perhaps, contributed more than anything else to make me wretched at school was the ignominious filth of the desks and the walls, the horrible mixture of chalk and ink which made me look upon a classroom as a place of abomination. And in winter time when the iron heating-stove used to glow red, and the air grew close and malodorous, it was through an intervening haze of cruel unsightliness that I glimpsed visions of beauty and glory, Cassandra lifting her ardent gaze to Heaven, or the triumph of Paulus Æmilius. And so it came about that in after years I had my studies to perform over again, and learn myself, unaided, what others had mistaught me. In justice to my masters I ought to say that I was an ill-subject for public and communal instruc-

tion. I was not less intelligent than my classmates, I was possibly more intelligent than some of them, but my intelligence was of a wholly different order. Some things I seized and understood with a strength and a depth remarkable for my age, while other things, that were reputed easy, I could never manage to get into my head. These inequalities did not balance one another. Lastly, though I was always of a gentle disposition, my gentleness was of the shy, untamed description, and, from my childhood onwards, I had always been in love with solitude. The thought of a grove in a wood, of a rivulet in a meadow, was enough to send me, as I sat on my form, into transports of desire and love and longing, that almost amounted to despair. Perhaps I should have fallen sick with grief in that dreadful school had I not been saved by a gift which I have retained all through my life, the gift of seeing the comic side of things. By their absurdities and their shortcomings my masters Crottu, Brard, and Beaussier provided me with the distractions of a comedy. They were, all unwittingly, my Molières; they saved me from mortal weariness of the spirit, and I owe them a profound debt of gratitude. The very peculiar working of my memory unfitted me for learning in a class. Unlike the other boys, who learnt quickly and forgot as quickly as they learnt, I was slow to acquire, but what I did acquire, I retained indefinitely, so that as a scholar I was always a day behind the fair. On the whole this disposition was rather

an advantage to me inasmuch as it prevented me from preparing for those examinations, those competitions that do so much harm to the brain. It has compensated me for other defects by enabling me to keep the bloom of freshness on my ideas. Certainly such a condition of mind was ill-adapted to benefit by mass teaching, which addresses itself solely to the memory, to the mechanical memory and not to the æsthetic memory, not to the divine Mnemosyne from whom the Muses spring. But let us beware: perhaps even as I say these things there yet lingers in my heart some trace, some vestige of rancour against Fontanet whose memory, swift as Cæsar's victories, triumphant and arrogant, filled me with envy and admiration.

When I was just in my sixteenth year I somehow or other managed to get through a horrible little examination called the "Matriculation," which was well adapted to debase both candidates and examiners. There was at that time a scientific section and a literary section. The one I went in for was of the second variety. It was the worse of the two, because, although one can understand that a poor boy might be called upon to define a pneumatic machine, or to say what he knew about the square of the hypotenuse, to cross-question him concerning his commerce with the Muses of Helicon would be an odious profanation. We had two days in which to display our knowledge; one day we had to do the written paper, the next was the *viva voce*.

On the morning of the second day my mother gave me the wherewithal to go and have my lunch on the Place de la Sorbonne, so that I should be on the spot when my name was called. But being blest in those days with a romantic soul, I kept the money, bought myself a little oatcake, and went and ate it on the Towers of 'Notre Dame. There I reigned over Paris. The Seine flowed on amid the house-tops, domes, and towers, and the eye followed it into the blue distance till the silver thread of it was lost among the green hills.

Beneath my feet lay fifteen hundred years of glory and great deeds, of crime and misery, an ample subject for my yet unformed and unpracticed mind to meditate upon. I know not of what I stayed there dreaming, but when I arrived within the gates of the old Sorbonne, I had missed my turn. Never within the memory of the oldest beadle had such a thing occurred before. I made a clean breast of it. They did not believe me. The truth lacked verisimilitude, and they put me down at the tail end of the list of candidates. The examiners were tired out and in an ill-humour. Apart from that all went well. I was asked to prove the existence of God. I did so at once. One of the examiners, a very learned man called Hase, displayed more wit than his colleagues. Leaning well back in his chair, and stroking his magnificent calf, he asked me whether the Rhône did not empty itself into Lake Ontario. I didn't like to say "No" for fear of appearing rude, and I main-

tained silence, whereupon he reproached me with a lack of ideas in the matter of geography.

I shook the dust of the old Sorbonne off my feet.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW I BECAME AN ACADEMICIAN



THE scholastic year was drawing to a close. For us seniors, it was our last year at school. In all right thinking minds the delight of being free at last was tempered with regret at giving up long-standing habits. One day beneath the acacias during midday recreation Maxime Denis, who excelled in Latin verse and had an affectionate disposition, delivered himself to us as follows:

"We are shortly about to enter into the great world, and each of us will go his own way, following the career he has chosen. While at school we have formed friendships that must not be lost. The friendships of youth ought to last all through life. To leave them behind at the school-gates when we go forth from them never to return, would be to leave behind us our most precious possession. We will not commit this fault. Here, in school, we will create without delay a centre to which we shall be able to repair. What sort of a centre shall it be, a club, a circle, a society, an academy? You fellows must decide."

The proposal was well received. It was at once put under discussion, and it was forthwith recognized that the foundation of a society, a circle, or a club necessitated considerable funds, an enormous amount of organization and legal knowledge, all of which things were outside the compass of the fellows in our forms. True, Fontanet undertook to organize a first-rate club within three months, but his seductive offers were declined. By a large majority we pronounced in favour of an Academy, without however having any precise idea of what such a thing might be.

After a long and confused discussion, Isambart suggested that we should draw up Articles of Association. The suggestion was approved; but the task seemed a thankless one, and no one undertook it. It was considered that it would suffice if we laid down that the Academicians should be chosen from among the members of the two senior forms, and that the meetings, which would take place at irregular intervals, should be devoted to readings and lectures, in which amusement should be combined with serious instruction.

We elected twenty academicians, reserving to ourselves the right to add to their number if need arose. I should be hard put to it to recall the names of the twenty. Let not that occasion surprise, for there exists, I am told, in the world, a celebrated Academy, no member of which is able to give the names of the forty who compose it. The great

thing was to find a title for our Academy. The following various proposals were made:

The Academy of Friends.

The Molière Academy.

The Fénelon Academy.

The Academy of Rhetoric and Philosophy.

The Academy of Chateaubriand.

Fontanet spoke in ringing incisive tones:

"Comrades, there was once a man who, endowed with a genius for oratory, all his long life through devoted his gifts to championing the cause of the vanquished. Let us do honour to so noble an example, and place our Academy under the patronage of Berryer."

This suggestion was greeted with jeers and laughter, not because we did not think it became us to show honour to a great advocate, but because we all knew that Fontanet, who was going to be a barrister, had the cool effrontery to imagine he would prove a second Berryer.

"Call it the Académie Fontanet straightaway," exclaimed Maxime Denis. Then Laboriette's voice went off like a rifle:

"I propose: Académie Française," said he. This was hailed with a mighty shout of laughter. He couldn't make out why, and got in a rage, for he was a fiery youth.

La Berthelière, who had an air of authority about

him, said in firm tones: "If you take my advice you will place yourself under the patronage of Blaise Pascal."

This proposal was carried with unanimity and enthusiasm.

We had found a name for our Academy; the next thing was to find it a domicile.

The bucolic Chazal offered us the loft of a corn merchant in the Rue du Regard in which to hold our meetings.

"We shall be all right there," he said, "but we shan't be able to have any lights for fear of fire."

This abode, which was more suitable for rats than academicians, did not find favour. Fontanet was of the opinion that we ought to meet in my bedroom, which he said was a large, airy apartment overlooking the finest quay in Paris. Scared out of my life at the prospect of having an Academy billeted upon me, I swore that what he called my room was but a wretched little dressing room in which you couldn't swing a cat round.

Mouron offered a lace-maker's workroom, Isambart a bookseller's shop parlour, Sauvigny his Uncle Maurice's flat. It only remained to find out whether these various premises were available. Next day Uncle Maurice's flat, the bookseller's shop parlour, and the lace-maker's workroom had disappeared as though by enchantment. They had vanished like Aladdin's palace beneath the wand of the wicked magician. We were beginning to despair of finding

accommodation, when Sauvigny guaranteed that he would get hold of Tristan Desrais' room. Tristan Desrais was the boy of whom I had been passionately fond for three months on account of his elegant appearance, but with whom I had fallen out because he did not choose me for his side when playing football one day. His room, on the second floor of an old mansion in the Rue Saint Dominique, was separated from his parents' part of the house by a long corridor. Sauvigny had seen the room and said it was splendid. Desrais, who happened at the moment to be playing prisoner's base, seemed unapproachable; but Sauvigny nerved himself to put the case. If Sauvigny was, so to speak, a Saint-Cyrian, Sauvigny was virtually a member of the *Borda's* crew. What passed on this occasion between the Young Army and the Young Navy has not been recorded. But Sauvigny, who was a little fellow, and as proud as a peacock, came and announced to us that Desrais didn't care a hang about the Académie Blaise Pascal, but that he was quite willing to lend his room to the Academicians. No sooner was this reply communicated to us than Sauvigny was requested to express to Desrais the grateful acknowledgments of the Academy. I refused to add my own, for I could not find it in me to forgive Desrais for my having been too fond of him. I had the bad taste to demand that he should be kept out of our Academy. My colleagues replied with one voice that we could not possibly exclude

from our Academy the person who provided it with a habitation. I prophesied that by fixing our quarters in the Rue Saint Dominique we should bring our fine institution to nought; a prophecy that was based on a profound knowledge of the character of my quondam friend. The list of members was drawn up, and at the head of it figured the name of Tristan Desrais.

Nouffard and Fontanet were entrusted with the task of purchasing, on the next half-holiday, a bust of Blaise Pascal, to be put up in our meeting room.

Mouron was elected President, and it was decided that I should deliver the inaugural address. This flattering selection "sat smiling to my heart" and enabled me to perceive, in the rôle of the glorious, delights which I have never since enjoyed again. My feet seemed scarcely to touch the earth. That very evening I started to compose my speech which was to be serious in tone yet full of charm. I piled on the ornaments; I added one or two more every day. I was fated to keep on doing so to the last minute. Never were purple passages so purple. There was no room in it for improvisation, nothing of the "go as you please" order, nothing in the way of natural simplicity. It was all ornament.

On the appointed day the two delegates went to the Rue Racine, and there discovered a plaster bust of Blaise Pascal. It was bigger than life-size, of meditative expression and lugubrious aspect. They ordered it to be sent to M. Tristan Desrais in the

Rue Saint Dominique. Evidently the tone of our Institution was to be grave, austere, even a little gloomy.

On the night fixed for the opening ceremony the rain came down in torrents, the water from the gutters poured down over the roads and pavements. The drains were choked and the water flooded the streets, umbrellas were blown inside out by a terrific wind. It was so dark you couldn't see where you were walking. I hugged my speech to my breast with both arms, to save it from the deluge. At last I got to the Rue Saint Dominique. When I reached the second floor, an old servant opened the door and conducted me in silence down a long, dark corridor, at the end of which I found the headquarters of the Academy. As yet only three Academicians had put in an appearance. But had they been more numerous, where would they have sat? There were only two chairs in the room and a bed, whereon Sauvigny and Chazal had taken their places beside Desrais, our host. On the top of the wardrobe, with its looking-glass doors, stood the bust of Pascal, the solitary monument which spoke to the soul in this room whose every wall was adorned with rapiers, swords, and sporting guns.

Desrais greeted me rather huffily, and, pointing to the bust, said:

"Well, if you think it's a joke to have that old mug looming down on you when you're getting into bed——"

We waited three-quarters of an hour, during which period two Academicians arrived together, followed by another one. They were Isambart, Denis, and Fontanet. The general impression was that no more would turn up.

"But what about Mouron, our President?" I exclaimed with the dismay of an orator who sees his audience reduced to insignificant proportions.

"Are you mad?" replied Isambart; "do you think they'd let Mouron, with his delicate chest, come out on a night like this, in all this wind and rain? Why, it would kill him!"

As it was no use waiting for the chairman to call on me to speak, I decided to call upon myself, and began to read my speech, which I knew was a fine one, though I realized that it was not perhaps quite in the right tone to suit the circumstances.

"Members of the Academy and dear Friends," I read, "It is a great honour for me to be called upon to set forth the purposes which guided you in founding this literary and scientific academy under the patronage of the great Pascal, whose image looks down so smilingly upon us. Two main purposes, welling forth like fertile streams from your hearts and minds have——"

At this point Desrais, who had greeted the exordium of my discourse with ironic applause, broke in and said:

"Look here, Nozière, you're not going on cough-

ing up that dreary stuff much longer, are you?"

There were a few protests raised in my favour, but how weak they seemed. They made little impression on Desrais, who went on with his tirade.

"Pack up your rubbish, and stow your gab. Besides, here comes the tea."

And at this point an old housekeeper came in carrying a tray, which she deposited on the table. When she had departed Desrais said with a disdainful pout:

"It's the tea my people have sent along!" Then he added with a mischievous laugh: "But I've got better stuff than that here."

And, taking a bottle of rum out of the cupboard, he announced that he was going to mix some punch and that, not having a proper bowl, he would use his wash-basin.

Suiting the action to the word, he put out the lamp and set a light to the punch.

It was then borne in upon me that I should have to abandon the reading of my speech, no one appearing anxious to hear the rest. That was a cruel blow to me.

The Academicians began prancing round the punch-bowl hand in hand. Fontanet and Sauvigny, like a pair of goblins, hurled themselves about with alarming frenzy. Suddenly a voice cried: "The Bust, the Bust!"

High on his cupboard, illumined by the livid flame, the bust looked green; it looked hideous,

terrible. It seemed like a corpse issuing from its grave. We lit the lamp again, and quaffed our punch by the cupful.

Desrais, tranquil and calm, unhitched the rapiers, and asked if anyone would fence a bout with him.

"I will," cried Chazal.

Never having handled a rapier in his life before, he attacked furiously, uttering loud shouts, and got in some shrewd thrusts on Desrais, who called him brute, savage, wild beast. But he liked the boy. He bet him he would hold a chair out at arm's length for a whole minute. Chazal accepted the challenge and won. Desrais conceived a respect for him. They both liked to show their strength.

"Let's have a wrestle," said Desrais.

"Right!" answered Chazal.

They stripped to the waist and came to grips. Chazal, big boned, swarthy, and rough hewn, presented a striking contrast with Desrais, who was built like a runner from Myrrho or an athlete from Cambridge or Eton. The latter, keeping cool the whole time, wrestled with perfect correctness, whereas the worthy Chazal, who knew nothing about the tricks of the game, played unsuspectingly into his adversary's hands, and quite innocently transgressed the rules of the ring. It was thus that he took hold of Desrais' head with both hands and spun him round, in spite of his indignant protests.

"You're disqualified," exclaimed Desrais; "it's a foul to collar by the neck."

"Maybe," answered the rustic Chazal with an ingenious smile, "but you're beaten anyhow."

Desrais poured out enormous quantities of punch. He got out some cards and began playing *écarté* with Sauvigny. Meanwhile, seized with sudden delirium, the Academicians began reviling that same Pascal whom shortly before they had chosen for their patron. They insulted his image, Fontanet hit it with a pair of boots which he had found in a cupboard. Desrais, still playing cards, at which he was losing heavily, asked Fontanet to let his things alone, adding, "As for the bust, you will do me a kindness if you get rid of it for me." Fontanet, the devil now in him, did not wait for a second invitation. He got up on a chair, and, seizing Blaise Pascal by his base, for he couldn't reach any higher, he pulled him down on to the floor, where he fell shattered to bits, with an appalling noise. The Academy huzza'ed in honour of the iconoclast.

The tumult and disorder were at their height when the housekeeper, who had brought in the tray, again made her appearance, and said to her young master:

"Your father would be glad if you would get rid of your friends immediately. It is past midnight and the noise is unbearable."

Daring as he was, Desrais raised no protest against this injunction, and his silence made us feel uncomfortable. We departed with our tails down, and sallied forth once more into the wind and rain.

The Académie Blaise Pascal never met again.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST DAY AT SCHOOL



At last it came, my final day at school. My parents, dear, well meaning souls, had made me go through the highest form with its precious "philosophy" by which I profited in a manner very contrary to their intentions. Though with no great cleverness to boast of, I found the philosophy that had been taught me so silly, so inept, so absurd, so ninny-like, that I never credited a word of the truths which it expounded, of the verities supposed to be preached and practised by every one who would pass for a worthy man and a decent member of society.

It was the final day of the school year. Most of the boys were going away for two months; some of the more fortunate, of whom I was one, were going for good. They were all busy packing up their books to take away with them. I left mine behind for the benefit of the establishment.

There was no class that day. Our master read to us about the distribution of the Eagles in *le Consulat et l'Empire* by M. Thiers. Thus the university

set the seal on my studies by introducing me to the worst writer in the French language.

I was much troubled at the thought that I should no longer be seeing Mouron every day. I mastered my feelings as I took hold of his little hot hand, for I was at the age when even the most laudable display of emotion was looked upon as a weakness unworthy of a man. As we should not now be seeing each other at school, we promised to meet at our people's houses.

I was very unhappy at school, almost constantly so, and I thought I was in for a splendid time when I left. When I issued from its walls never to return, I was not so happy as I expected. My delight was neither so great nor so unalloyed as I had counted it would be. It was the fault of a weak and timid nature.

It was also the effect of that odious disciplinary system which, governing a boy's every thought and movement, from childhood to adolescence, makes him incapable of enjoying freedom and unfits him to be a member of society. Even I was conscious of that, though I got my freedom every night. But what must it have been for the boarders who never escaped from their prison? Education in common, as it is imparted nowadays, not only fails to prepare a boy for the life he has to follow, but actually unfits him for it, if he possesses any instincts of obedience and docility at all. The discipline imposed on little first-form brats becomes irksome and humiliating

when applied to young men of seventeen or eighteen. The very uniformity of the exercises makes them insipid. The mind is stultified by them, as it is warped by the system of rewards and punishments which have no counterpart in real life, where our actions bear in themselves their good or evil consequences. So when a boy leaves school, he is at a loss to know how to act and afraid to use his freedom. I was vaguely conscious of all this, and my peace of mind was considerably disturbed.

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CHAPTER XV

CHOOSING A CAREER



HAD to make up my mind without delay what I was going to be, for my parents were not sufficiently well off to keep me on their hands for an indefinite period. This question of my future made me anxious and preoccupied, and I had a distinct foreboding that I should experience some trouble in finding a place for myself in a world in which you have to push and elbow your way; that being an art of which I was ignorant.

I perceived that I was somehow different from others, without knowing whether that difference was for my good or ill, and the feeling perturbed me. And then I was painfully surprised that my parents gave me no help or advice, and I had to infer that they could discover no occupation for which I was fitted. I went and consulted Fontanet, who had already put his name down for the Law Schools. He advised me to go in for the Bar, being quite sure that I shouldn't do as well at it as he did. And certainly, with the little tin trumpet he carried in

his throat and all the odds and ends of the newspapers neatly pigeon-holed in his brain, he was bound to make as good a barrister as the general run. At the first blush the Bar rather took my fancy. I was fond of oratory, and I said to myself, "I will make a clever speech in defence of some young widow who will fall in love with me." For with me all roads led to love.

In order to reconnoitre the position, I went with Fontanet to the Law Schools. Being a lover of the antiquities and the glories of my city, it was with feelings of devout respect that I breathed in the dusty atmosphere of that mount of learning.

On reaching the bottom of the Rue Soufflot, we made our way into the beautiful square with the solid-looking frontages of the Mairie and the École de Droit on our right and left and, enthroned over all, the stately Pantheon with its perfect dome. On our left was the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, its walls covered with inscriptions, resembling not so much an edifice dedicated to studious toil as a mausoleum in imitation of the antique. At the far end the Chapel Royal of Saint Etienne du Mont rose up in all the pomp of its florid magnificence, and the eye lighted on the cloisters of Sainte Geneviève with their quaint, irregular arches. O days of old, O memories of bygone times, O hallowed remnants of the storied Past!

But Fontanet was in no mood to stand gaping at old buildings. He pushed me into the amphi-

theatre, where Professor Demangeat was expounding the principles of Roman law. A crowd of students were listening to him in profound silence, and taking notes with such eagerness that they seemed bent on recording every single word he said.

"Old Bugnet gives the same course of lectures," said Fontanet, "but he doesn't get many students. He's a filthy old beggar. His nose is always running, and he mops up the stream with a great red handkerchief as big as a sheet. But crowds go to Demangeat's lectures, as you see. They're thought a lot of."

I was not much struck with his Demangeat. His voice seemed colourless, and his delivery was monotonous. I was right there, but if I had possessed a more balanced judgment I should have perceived that what the students rightly valued so highly was his clear and orderly exposition.

Fontanet, who was never still himself, and never allowed anyone else to be, whisked me off without giving me a moment's breathing space, out of the big amphitheatre into the hall where the candidates for the licentiate were up for their *viva voce*. The examiners conducted the proceedings with considerable solemnity and in a manner calculated to impress the imagination. They were seated in their robes at a table covered with a green cloth which descended to the floor in ample folds. There were three of them thus seated in solemn session, like the judges of the underworld, and they glared at the

little timid candidate who stood cowering before them. The judge who sat in the middle was a voluminous personage, very important and very unkempt. It was he who was examining as we entered the room. His sole idea was, obviously, to make his power felt and to inspire awe. He imparted an air of imposing solemnity to his questions. Sometimes he would wrap them in words of cunning ambiguity, even as did Sphinx, that virgin cruel, and he uttered them with the voice of a roaring bull, the little shrinking candidate answering in a weak and quavering treble. The judge who was seated on his right was the next to put his questions. He was a little scraggy man, green as a parrot, and he spoke in a thin, piping voice that seemed to issue from the top of his head. To all appearance, he conducted the examination not so much with the object of testing the candidates' knowledge, as of delivering himself of sarcastic references to his big colleague, to whom he referred by innuendoes, and with whom he decorously exchanged glances charged with animosity. The three judges hated each other with a poisonous hatred, but there their hatred ended. Content with having made the candidate shake in his shoes, they allowed him to pass, and all was accomplished without weeping and gnashing of teeth.

To crown the entertainment, we went to see an examination in the Faculty of Medicine. This was quite a different affair. The candidate was a big fellow, going bald, and apparently no longer in the

flush of youth. He was plying his scalpel on a dead body that was lying in front of him. It was the body of a little old man who seemed to have a grin on his face. A professor with moustaches like a Tartar, lying back at full length in his armchair, was questioning the student.

"Well," he said, "this gland, what about it? Are you going to answer this week or next?"

He got no reply. His two assessors were writing letters or correcting proofs. One of them was wearing a cap of unusual shape and extraordinary size. It was trimmed with fur, and looked more like a chapska than a cap. Fontanet informed me that it was the model of a headgear designed in 1792 by Louis David. It had been kept in a glass case at the Medical School, but the professor had told one of the attendants to give it him in a tone that brooked no refusal. Again the examiner put the question:

"What is this gland?"

This time he got his answer.

"It's atrophied."

Whereat the professor answered that that was the corpse's fault, and they'd have to give it a bad mark.

In spite of the careless, happy-go-lucky manner of the professors, there was something of a more serious character about these proceedings than about the law examination we had just been witnessing. The importance of the science counterbalanced what was ludicrous in the scene.

I left that examination room with a sort of notion that I should like to go in for medicine. But as a matter of fact the idea was not so firmly rooted as to prompt me to enter on a long and difficult course of study for which I was not fitted. I was afraid lest, when my young days were over, I should be like the big student, who failed to identify the gland in the neck of the leering corpse. I therefore abandoned the plan before it had taken definite shape.

Since then I have often regretted that I did not carry it out. I know nothing in the world that is finer than the life of such a man as Claude Bernard, and I know of some country doctors whose lives are so full of interest and good deeds that they fill me with envy and admiration. My father performed the duties of his profession with unremitting zeal, but he never seemed to want me to follow in his footsteps.

During dinner I came to the conclusion that I would go in for the Law, but later on, alone in my bedroom, in the stillness of night, I reasoned with myself, and it was forcibly borne in upon me that Nature, the niggard, had refused me the precious gift of eloquence. I realized that I had never in my life been able to say half a dozen words *impromptu*, and that if there was one thing in the world that I should never be able to do, it was to make a speech in a court of justice. As, for many reasons, I did not entertain the idea of becoming a solicitor, judge or notary, I came to the conclusion that my

legal studies would impose a useless sacrifice on my parents, and so I gave up the idea of mastering the intricacies of the Institutes of Justinian and the Code Napoléon. And immediately I felt sorry I had not begun to prepare for Saint-Cyr. It seemed to me a splendid thing to be an officer, granted of course he was of the type portrayed by Alfred de Vigny, melancholy and magnanimous. I had devoured with passionate eagerness *Servitude et Grandeur militaires*, and I proudly pictured myself walking silently and with measured steps across the parade-ground ready for any deed of devotion and self-sacrifice, my figure enveloped in an elegant military cloak. And then at mess we should hear that war had been declared. We should set about our preparations with majestic calmness and that lofty determination which David succeeded in depicting so vividly on the faces of Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans. And then I pictured our departure. I rode along with my men. The roads simply flew beneath us, bearing with them on either hand an endless succession of fields, villages, woods and heights and rivers. Suddenly we came upon the enemy. I fought without any bitterness or hate. We took some prisoners. I treated them humanely, and saw to it that the enemy's wounded were as well cared for as our own. At the second encounter, which was terrible, I was decorated on the field of battle. There is no doubt I made a fine officer. I was quartered with several of my comrades in a château which

commanded a view of the forest, and which was inhabited by a lovely countess of great beauty, whose husband was a general. He, however, was a coarse and brutal fellow, and she loved him not. We became passionately and devotedly attached to each other. The enemy were vanquished, and from that moment they all became dear to me.

Next morning I began to doubt whether I had pictured the soldier's life quite in its true colours.

Fontanet dropped in early and greeted me with that superior air which never left him. He told me I must put my name down for the Law School without delay, and that he would go with me that same day to the Secretary's office, where he was well known. I begged him to do nothing of the kind. I told him I was abandoning the idea of the Law, and gave my reasons. He wouldn't listen to a word, and assured me that with a little training I should be able to speak as well as anybody else, and that no very great ability was needed. He often went to the Law Courts, and he knew of a barrister there who suffered from almost total amnesia, yet with the aid of notes written on a piece of paper about the size of one's hand, he could make an excellent speech. And then there was another man who stammered terribly, and would suddenly begin barking like a dog; yet Fontanet had heard him conduct a case with wonderful skill, and finally win it.

"I won't go so far as to say that you have any particular ability, but it's wonderful what steady

plodding will do. *Labor improbus* as old Crottu used to say when he told you how lazy you were. Keep hammering away, that's the whole thing. Look here, I'll tell you what. Begin right away. I'll give you some tips, and you'll be astonished at the progress you'll make."

I was unlucky enough to let him see by too sudden a refusal that his suggestion was unwelcome. He had already suspected it. When he knew it for certain, nothing could stop him. Tables, chairs, my very bed were all tumbled about in a disorder that was supposed to represent the court. He banged my books about, jumbled up my papers, upset my ink-pot, emptied the contents of the water jug on to the carpet, and, shoving me violently between the wall and the ruin that had been my dressing-table, he shouted at me in imperious tones:

"Stop there! That's the Bar. You are counsel for the defence. I am the judge. You will speak when I call upon you."

It was enough to frighten you.

I used to wonder every day at the ease with which I found professions that did not suit me. It was a game in which I excelled. Thus I thought it would be a fine thing to be an engineer. How splendid, I thought, with the aid of applied mathematics, to superintend constructive works such as bridges, roads, machines, and to be the guiding spirit of thousands of workpeople. In those days engineers enjoyed a degree of consideration which

they have not wholly retained. There were not so many of them as there are now and they made more money. In the comedies at the Odéon it was frequently a young engineer who would lead the cotillon, flutter the hearts of the maidens, and end by making a first-rate match. Alas, bifurcation, by sending me along the literary road, barred the way to scientific callings, and so, farewell to roads, bridges, mines, and the first-rate match!

I had to seek another avenue for my activities. The diplomatic service would have been agreeable to me on account of the consideration attaching to it. It would have certainly been extremely pleasant to become an ambassador and represent my country in foreign courts. I nourished, I caressed these ambitions but solely to laugh at my poor self, for I must tell you that, prone to raillery as I have been all my life through, I never rallied any one so mercilessly as myself, or with a greater measure of delight. However, to cut a long story short, for brevity is the soul of wit, I fell back on the consulates and decided on Naples, where I took a pretty vine-clad villa beside the blue sea.

Not long after this I went to see Mouron, Mouron *pour les petits oiseaux*, who lived with his mother and sisters in a pretty flat in the Rue des Saints-Pères. I found the rustic Chazal there. He had grown a stubborn bristly beard that grew all awry. It was a pleasure to shake Mouron's little hot hand again and Chazal's leg of mutton fist. Chazal was

passing through Paris and very anxious to get back to Sologne where he had charge of some land reclaiming works. I told these two good friends what a quandary I was in about choosing a career.

Mouron asked me if I had not thought of some work under Government, especially the Treasury, where, with brains or influence, you might get a position as inspector. That was the door at which he advised me to knock. On my promising him I would do so, he warned me that admission was competitive. The examination, however, was not very stiff; his cousin had got through easily. All they wanted, he believed, was a little mathematics, a knowledge of French, and good, clear handwriting.

"I should advise you," he said, "to go to a crammer, a man called Duployer, a young, breezy individual with plenty of go about him. Everybody who thinks of trying for the Treasury goes to Duployer. He lives in the Rue d'Alger, No. 7 or No. 9, I forget which."

Chazal thought it a mistake to shut oneself up in a government office.

"What do you want to go and make a prisoner of yourself for? Do as I do. Cultivate the soil. Life is only worth living in the country. The work is hard, but you keep in fine fettle. If you take my advice you will go in for stock-raising. There is nothing more interesting. You see life at its source. But every kind of work in the fields is great. I was

led to study the variations in vegetable species. You wouldn't believe the discoveries I made. I have seen extraordinary variations come suddenly into being and perpetuate themselves from season to season. What do you think? Would you believe it if I told you I had seen a whitethorn lose its thorns and multiply its blossoms a hundredfold in a patch of rich soil? Well, I have."

He was quite carried away. I thought him more uncouth and strange than ever. He continued to grow in vigour, while Mouron was shrinking and diminishing every day. But I was at an age when we don't foresee misfortunes.

Next day I went into the little place in the Rue d'Alger where Duployer gave his lessons. He questioned me about my parents, and his manner was at once very familiar and somewhat cold. He told me he would make me work with the son of a man who had been a highly placed official under the Empire, young Fabio Falcone, who was also preparing for the Treasury entrance examination. That was all that was done at the establishment of Duployer, who seemed to me much more like the manager of a business office than a civil service coach. I took lessons for about a fortnight, and during the whole time Duployer never gave me the slightest hope of success. But he was always absolutely certain that Falcone was bound to get through, though he was just as weak at sums, and a great deal worse at composition than I was and wrote an abominable scrawl.

After some reflection, I understood what was at the bottom of Duployer's prognostications. I was grateful to him for his frankness, and I gave up taking useless lessons. I subsequently learnt that I had done very wisely in refraining to present myself for an examination whose sole purpose it was to eliminate those candidates who were not sufficiently recommended.

I continued, like Jérôme Paturot, to seek for a position. I could not bring myself to follow the advice of the worthy Chazal. I loved the country. It filled me with thrills, with langours and with a delicious unrest. The day was to come when the country would be my only love. In the country I was fated to pass the happiest and pleasantest years of my life. But that time was not yet. I could not bring myself to bid adieu, with no prospect of returning, to the city where Art and Beauty flourish and the very stones seem to sing. Moreover, I had a good reason for not farming my land. I had no land to farm. I could not be a tiller of the soil; but having been taught by experience to bring my ideas down to the level of mediocrity, I thought I would be a merchant. What gave me this inclination was that I had read in some English romances of the eighteenth century of certain merchants who cut a goodish figure with their coats of crimson or maroon coloured cloth and their warehouses filled with bales of merchandise. I had also seen in a play of Sedaine enacted at the Théâtre Français, a very

worthy merchant who lived in great style, and when at home sported a superb dressing-gown. And in real life too I had met merchants who wore a comfortable and prosperous air. Resolved then to become a merchant, or rather a merchant's clerk, for I had neither stock-in-trade nor the wherewithal to buy it, I endeavoured to decide what manner of trade I should follow. That was the rub. With so many trades to choose from, whereof I knew neither the advantages nor the drawbacks, how was I to make up my mind? Directory in hand, I kept asking myself what it would be well for me to select. Should I be a bootmaker, a brazier, a brewer, a cement-maker, a chemist, a coal merchant, an engine-driver, a gunsmith, a jeweller, a joiner, a landscape-gardener, a marble cutter, an optician, or what? I could not answer. What tended to diminish my perplexity—I tell you this in confidence, gentle reader—was that I had a presentiment that I was not more capable of selling guns, jewels or beer, than coal, brass, cement, shoes or spectacles. This reflection relieved me of the difficulty of choosing, but it drove me to desperation.

I was rescued from my troubles when I least expected it. It was at twenty minutes past four one Saturday afternoon, that the event came to pass. I was strolling that day along the Quai de la Conférence, which was more rustic, more lonely and more beautiful than we know it now, when I ran across M. Louis de Ronchard who was coming from

les Ternes where he had a little abode filled with books and prints. I was very fond of him, but I seldom went to see him, for I did not indulge the hope that he would take any interest in what I had to say. Perhaps there are a few persons yet living who still preserve the memory of this excellent man. Though I know them not, I am in communion with them. Louis de Ronchard left some poems behind him which bear witness to the beauty of his soul, and also some books of high merit on Greek art which he loved both well and wisely. Lamartine, whose friend he was, devoted one number of his *Cours Familier de Littérature* to him. At the date whither these reminiscences of mine carry me back, Louis de Ronchard, though not old, was young no longer. Any one who was well acquainted with him knows that he was never old at any period of his long life, for he never ceased to play the lover. Some threads of gold still lingered among his strands of blanchèd hair. The delicate skin of his brow was streaked with every roseate shade. His moustache had begun to pale its pristine fires. He wore with an air a coat of French cut, much bestained and quite threadbare. His voice was rich and his utterance, though a little slow, was pleasing and attractive. He was full of enthusiasm about a Roman mosaic which had just been discovered at Lambessa, and of which he had received a water-colour copy. He talked about the Empire whose fall he considered was and ought to be at hand. He

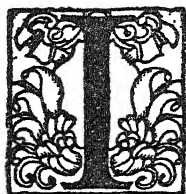
also appeared interested about some new book or other which was making a sensation. Then having said good-bye, he was resuming his walk when suddenly he turned again and said:

"I was going to ask you to come and see me, there's something I should like to talk to you about. We are bringing out, some of my friends and I, with one of the big publishers, *The Lives of the Painters*, in instalments. It will take the place of Charles Blanc's work which is now out of date. It is a big task we are undertaking. You would be doing us a service if you could get together some of the material, correct the proofs and contribute some matter of your own if necessary; if, in short, you would do for our publication what a sub-editor does for a big review. It will involve a great deal of work, and you would have to be at it every day, but you will find it interesting. The scale of remuneration will be arranged by the publisher who will give you a room to work in."

Three days afterwards I was engaged on a very agreeable work which, if it was not fated to last my lifetime, might at least afford me an opportunity of procuring other congenial work, and I was occupying a study at a big bookseller's in the Faubourg St. Germain, a study adorned with beautiful photographs of Saskia, Lavinia and *The Man with the Torn Glove*.

CHAPTER XVI

MONSIEUR INGRES



IHAD a passion for the arts. To reach the Louvre from our house I had but to cross the Seine, and I went there almost every day, so that I may say with truth that my youth was nurtured amid the splendours of a palace. One thing I must say in justice to my schoolmasters, which is that they made me understand the Greek genius, though they themselves understood it not. Hour after hour I spent in the Campana museum which had just been opened, and among the Greek vases which many people still called Etruscan vases. It was in studying the paintings which adorned them that I learned to appreciate beauty of form, and it was thus, without doubt, that I came to understand the genius of Ingres.

It cannot be said that Ingres gave us back the art of Greece. It was not in that direction that his efforts tended. His methods belonged to his own times; nevertheless we find in Greek art a quality of taste that is to be met with nowhere else save in him. Rich and varied are the enthusiasms of a

youth of twenty. I thought a great deal of Delacroix. The Chapel of the Angels at Saint Sulpice filled me with wonder and admiration, and though people said that mural painting should have less relief and greater tranquillity, I nevertheless thought it was a fine frenzy that within a space of twenty square feet had contrived to include magnificent colonnades, horses, angels, mountains, trees, shining distances, and the whole canopy of heaven. Thanks be to the gods, I did not underrate Delacroix. But Ingres inspired me with a profounder sentiment: he inspired me with love. I knew well enough that his art was too lofty to be accessible to the many, and I was pleased with myself for having thus discerned its beauty unaided. Such miracles are wrought by love alone. I had an understanding appreciation of that drawing which achieved the perfection of beauty by keeping close to nature. I loved that painting which was more sensuous, more voluptuous than any other, and withal magnificent in its gravity. Ingres lived about two hundred paces from our house, on the Quai Voltaire. I knew him by sight. He was at this time past eighty. For ordinary folk, to grow old is to decay; for men of genius it is an apotheosis. When I met him I seemed to see his masterpieces following in procession behind him, and I was deeply stirred.

One night I happened to be at the Châtelet where they were playing the *Magic Flute* with Christine Nilsson in the company for the first time. I had an

orchestra stall. Long before the curtain went up the house was full. I saw M. Ingres making his way towards me. He was easily recognizable with his bull's head, his eyes still black and piercing, his small stature, and his powerful shoulders. He was known to be fond of music, and folk would smile when they spoke of him and his violin. It at once dawned on me that, having the regular entrée to the theatre, he had come in and was trying to find a seat. I was about to offer him my own, but he did not give me time.

"Young man," he said, "give me your seat, I am Monsieur Ingres."

I rose, radiant with delight. The wonderful old man had paid me the signal honour to ask me for my seat.

There is another painter of the French school who recaptured something of the beauty of antiquity, and that is Poussin. He is a classic in the arrangement of his scenes, and in the attitude and style of his figures. But M. Ingres alone, in his drawing, brings back to us the sensuousness of the Pagan world. It was not by the dubious paths of archæology that he joined company with the ancients, but by the unerring flight of genius!

CHAPTER XVII

MONSIEUR DUBOIS AT HOME



MONSIEUR DUBOIS was a grammarian of awe-inspiring powers. In all questions connected with the true meaning of words and phrases he was a severe and uncompromising authority. With regard to spelling, however, he displayed a certain measure of indifference. He said he could not understand why people wasted their valuable time over such trifles. He used to say that Noel and Chapsal's grammar was a drill sergeant's grammar imposed on the people by the insatiable tyranny of Napoleon, which exercising itself not only on deeds but on ideas, aimed at stamping out all independence of mind. And when, in the old man's presence, my mother talked of the government of participles—participles were her eternal bugbear—she was dumfounded at hearing him reply that he did not want to know any more about participles than Pascal and Racine knew about them, which was nothing at all.

M. Dubois' tastes in literature froze me with respect and trepidation. He was a classic, but his

attitude was highly critical, and informed with a philosophy that dictated all his judgments. He put Saint Evremond above Pascal. Bossuet, he would have it, expressed paltry ideas in a harsh style, and he said that his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* was as foolish as the History of Paulus Orosius, from which it was copied.

It was impossible, he used to say, for a wise man to take any pleasure in Corneille, because Napoleon admired him. And it is indeed a fact that his tragedy *Horace* savours of the shambles. M. Dubois held *l'Esprit des Lois* and the *Essai sur les mœurs* to be the two finest memorials of the human mind. He had a fondness for Voltaire's tragedies, despite their imperfections of style. For poets, if we took his word, there were none save the Greeks and the Romans. In them he delighted, and he always carried about with him a Theocritus or a Catullus in a beautifully printed pocket edition, for he was a bibliophile.

He knew Virgil by heart, and he used to tell how one day he and General Miollis having recited the Fourth book of the *Æneid* together, both burst into tears. Rhyme rendered modern poetry intolerable to him. He considered it a barbarous device which fulfilled no purpose but to rivet the unstable attention of the coarse and ignorant, and to serve as a clumsy means of marking the cadence for untutored ears. He had a theory that this regular iteration of the same sounds had originally been nothing more

than a kind of *memoria technica* to help people who, for want of practice, had a difficulty in committing things to memory. Nevertheless, his dislike of rhyme did not prevent him from deriving great enjoyment from the poetry of La Fontaine, Voltaire, and Parny. But there he stopped short. Of the Romantic school he knew nothing at all, and of the prose writers of his day only such works as dealt with politics and history. The *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, which did not find favour with the public, were particularly displeasing to M. Dubois, who found fault with Chateaubriand for his overloaded style and vacuity of ideas.

A taste so severe was likely to be exclusive and not easily communicable. Moreover, taste is a thing that, with the general run of men, is of late formation, being the outcome of long and often sorrowful experience. Taste, being the sense of what is pleasing, is tempered and refined by suffering. Though the old man was so kind as to take an interest in me almost as soon as I could walk, it was not he who instructed me in the choice of words, but he did inspire me with a love of the imitative arts and an ardent enthusiasm for the beauty of material things.

Like all the archæologists of his time, M. Dubois was principally indebted for his acquaintance with Greek sculpture to the works of the Roman epoch. He did not lack a feeling for grand and simple things, but he had seen the marbles of the Parthenon

too late on in his career, and, in his eyes, the *Laocoon* was still the most perfect expression of the Beautiful. He had travelled in Italy at a period when few people went there, and having mixed a great deal with the artists of his day, he had acquired, without any great expense, a collection of treasures which he used to enjoy in silent meditation. But (in this world there is no happiness without its alloy) the tranquillity of this quiet dwelling with its choice contents was marred by his housekeeper. Clorinde "drank." And M. Dubois, though he kept things very much to himself, once told my mother that one night he had found Clorinde dead drunk in her kitchen, and the place itself in a blaze. I could not for the life of me make out why he did not send her away. My mother exhibited less surprise.

Every now and then, when he was pleased with my progress, he would say:

"My child, I will show you my antiques, and also some bits of painting such as they don't produce nowadays, for we are overwhelmed by the barbarians. Drawing is one of the lost arts."

Those whom he called barbarians were people like Couture, Cognet, Deveria, and particularly Delacroix, of whom he had a horror. He did not understand him. He did not understand everything. But who of us can flatter himself that his understanding is universal?

In proposing to ask me to his house M. Dubois

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was doing me a great honour and a rare. Dwelling alone with his old housekeeper, without relatives and without friends, he received no living soul within his walls. And so there were strange stories extant concerning that abode in which none had ever set foot. It was situated on the second floor, overlooking the court, in an old mansion in the Rue Sainte-Anne: M. Dubois had lived there ever since he was a child.

*Naître, vivre et mourir dans la même maison.**

M. Dubois had had a charming mother whom he had worshipped. She was beautiful, played the harp like Madame de Genlis, and painted flowers like Van Spandonck. She had died suddenly in 1815, and her room, so people said, had been left untouched by her son—her harp, a love song open upon the harpsichord, her box of water-colours and the vase of flowers which she had begun to paint, all buried now beneath a shroud of dust that for forty years had been slowly gathering over them. It was said that in M. Dubois' drawing-room there was the portrait of a lady with powdered hair whose right hand was hidden by a bouquet of roses. It was thought to be the portrait of M. Dubois' great grandmother, who from a lonely deathbed had written to her absent son calling down curses on his head. But six weeks after she had been laid in her grave, they found that her right hand had been

* To be born, to live and die in the same house.

effaced from the picture and replaced by a bouquet of roses just freshly painted in. It was thought that she herself had come and wrought this substitution so that people might know that she had revoked the terms of her last letter. There had been several victims of the Reign of Terror in this house, and their ghosts haunted its staircases and corridors.

From time to time M. Dubois would repeat:

"Yes, my child, you must come and see my treasures one of these days."

My godfather, who was one of the best and most accommodating of men, used now and then to chaff M. Dubois for entertaining such veneration for antiquity. My godfather allowed that there was beauty in the antique, but he said it was a cold beauty, and did not speak to the heart. He, like Gautier, had a predilection for the old pictures of the German school and the early Italians.

One day, when he was singing the praises of the Quattrocento masters, M. Dubois expressed his agreement. "Yes," he said, "I look on Mantegna as a very great master. About thirty years ago at Verona I came across a 'Christ in the Tomb,' by him, drawn with tremendous strength and spirit. It was a splendid piece of work."

And then he added, turning towards me, "My child, I must let you see it."

This time we fixed a date for my visit. It was, I remember, the Thursday after Easter. I wore my best clothes and my top hat, for in those days the

bowler was not permissible even for quite young people. At half-past one I left home, feeling very excited.

Just as I got out on the landing, I heard some one puffing as Mélanie, our old servant, used to puff, and I saw old Mother Cochelet sitting doubled up on the stairs, gasping for breath. She was really hideous. The wen which blocked up her right eye was now about the size of one's fist, and from this blocked-up eye a thick rusty rheum trickled down her grimy cheek. Her squalid old bonnet and black head band, shaken all awry by her fits of coughing, revealed a dirty bald head. A pair of massive gold drops hanging from her ears put the finishing touch on her repulsiveness. I was ill-advised enough as I passed her to hasten my steps and turn away my head. In the midst of her gasps she called after me in a croaking voice. I went up to her. She glared at me with an evil, angry eye as she said:

"My little friend, when you heard me puffing didn't you say to yourself, 'Why, it must be a gram-pus?' You must have done, because if you had thought I was a woman, you would have taken your hat off to me."

Then she let her head fall forward on to her knees again and recommenced to gasp.

I went red, stammered out some excuses and offered her my arm to help her up the stairs. She sullenly refused. I departed, abashed and sad at heart.

But no sooner was I out of doors than the fresh wind, the sparkling air, and the smiling heavens filled me with merriment, and I soon forgot. I loved my city, and I painted it in miniature within my heart so that I might embrace it tenderly. I loved my royal river Seine, sedate and sober and lovely with the loveliness of towered cities; I loved the storied quays which I knew so well, with their trim avenues of plane trees, historic houses and stately palaces. They were wrapt in silence and calm those beautiful quays in the days of which I speak. Their majesty was unruffled then by the vulgar clatter of the tramcars. I crossed the river by the bridge of iron guarded by its four women in stone who were never known to smile. I passed through the courtyard of the Louvre where stood, its every stone eloquent of our history, the Palace of the Tuileries, basely given to the flames ten years later, and afterwards levelled with the ground by a horde of malefactors. Passing through the stairway gate I crossed the Rue de Rivoli and plunged into a maze of narrow, winding streets whose houses have long since succumbed to the onslaughts of the pick, and thus came to the corner of the Rue Sainte-Anne and the Rue Thérèse. There M. Dubois had lived from his childhood's days, on the second floor of a Louis XV house. Clorinde came to answer the door. If she "drank"—and we were assured that she did—her drunkenness must have been terrifically secret. Never in my life have I beheld an

old woman more grave, more silent, more spotless, or more calm. From the very entrance, the abode of M. Dubois bespoke the antiquary and the connoisseur. The lobby was filled with pieces of statuary and Roman sarcophagi. In the dining-room were marble statues and some of those beautiful red vases adorned with figures in black which, though Greek, were in those days still called Etruscan vases. Then M. Dubois displayed to me what he considered his most precious treasure, to wit a torso in marble from Pentelicus of a young bacchanal with his fawn skin cast over his shoulder. He bade me admire its grace, its purity, its simplicity.

"The mutilation of such a piece of work as that," he said, "is one of humanity's greatest crimes. But when a work attains this degree of perfection, its beauty, in all its plenitude, resides in every one of its separate parts. Whereas in our modern works, if you take away the expression, that is to say the grimace, there is nothing left."

And then M. Dubois gave rein to his eloquence.

"In poetry, in art, in philosophy, we must get back to the ancients. Why? Because naught that is beautiful, fair or wise is now wrought any more in the world. To the Greeks it was given to bring art to perfection. Such was the privilege of a highly gifted race who, in a happy clime, beneath a radiant sky, in a land of harmonious lines, beside an azure sea, practised the ways of freedom.

"There is a speech in Herodotus, my son, which we must bear in memory. The old historian puts it into the mouth of Demaratus, the Spartan, who is addressing Xerxes. 'Know, O king, that Poverty is the faithful friend of Greece, Virtue is of her company, the daughter of Wisdom and Good Governance.' The Greeks (and 'tis the happiest feature of their genius) took man as the measure of all things, and they believed in the justice of the gods or, at least, in their moderation."

With a minuteness that had a flattering implication for me, M. Dubois showed me the pictures which he had brought back with him from Italy, or which he had collected in former days in Paris. He drew my particular attention to the masters whom he held in the highest esteem, Guido, Reni, Carracci, l'Espagnoletto, Battoni, and Raphael Mengs. Those hirsute faces of martyrs and evangelists bathed in deep shadow, filled me with sadness. Some academical figures by David, which he praised very highly, did not dispel the gloom. M. Dubois himself thought there was a certain coarseness about David, but he was pleased with him because he broke with the bad taste of Boucher, Pierre, and Fragonard.

My host now led me into a room where doves were billing and cooing above a pair of tarnished mirrors. There was some measure of foundation for the rumours that were current concerning this mysterious apartment. There was a harp with

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loosened strings, and some rolls of music on a harpsichord. On the wall I saw the portrait of a lady with powdered hair, a lace scarf folded over her bosom, her right hand hidden underneath some roses that seemed to have been painted in afterwards by a hasty hand. But M. Dubois merely said that the furniture in this room belonged to his parents.

Then, showing me a Louis XV chest of drawers richly inlaid and adorned with gilt bronzes, gilded armchairs covered with pastoral tapestry, valances from the looms of Beauvais, he murmured with a faint smile:

"All those things belonged to my great-grandmother. They caused me many a pang in days gone by. You know that at the time of the Directoire and the Consulate a great revolution took place in matters of art. Taste, which was already becoming purer in the latter days of the monarchy, was all for the antique, and the elaborate ornamental work of the previous generation was generally regarded as grotesque. I was then living with my parents. I was young and possessed of some degree of *amour-propre*, and it was painful for me to live among all these out-of-date things and to have to let my friends see them, some of whom were artists, pupils of David, and like him, completely enamoured of everything Greek and Roman. I remember that one day I was presented to Madame de Noailles, who, having returned from exile, was living in a house in the

Chaussée d'Antin decorated by David and furnished from designs by Percier and Fontaine. On the walls were painted, to imitate bronze, faces, helmets, shields, swords, and friezes of warriors. There were Romulus and Remus being suckled by the wolf, Brutus passing sentence on his sons, Virginius sacrificing his daughter, and so on and so forth. One took one's seat in a curule chair. The boudoir was decorated with paintings on a red ground in imitation of the frescoes at Herculaneum. This style of furniture and decoration struck me as admirable. I know not whether the beauty of my hostess, whose fair hair and arms of marble were truly magnificent, increased my admiration for the lofty walls which she surveyed, or for the seats whereon she reclined like a goddess, but I came away from the Hôtel de Noailles wild with enthusiasm.

"When, on my return home, I saw our secretaires with their bulging curves, the armchairs with their twisted feet, the tapestries with their shepherds and their sheep, I almost wept for shame and mortification. I tried to make my father understand that these old-fashioned things were quite ridiculous, and that even the Chinese themselves had never produced anything so absurd and grotesque. My father agreed. 'I know quite well,' he said, 'that they make better things nowadays, and that taste has improved. If some one would care to exchange my old rummage for a suite of furniture designed by Messrs. Percier and Fontaine, I would willingly

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consent: but as no one is likely to be such a duffer as to do that, I shall put up with the things that my parents put up with, since I am neither young enough nor rich enough to furnish in the latest style."

"Those were bitter words to hear," added M. Dubois, "and yet you perceive that, whether from parsimony, filial piety or pure negligence, I have kept all my grandmother's furniture, and I am told that, from the point of view of the domestic economist, I did no bad thing; they say, indeed, that it was a good stroke of business, and that those old things, lately so decried, have come into their own again, and now fetch a good price."

While he was speaking, my eyes were fixed on a little canvas hung up beside the bed. Till then, I had only looked on figures of aged men by Guido and Carracci, martyrs by Ribera, a terrible Eliezar surrounded by strange camels by Battoni, a *Christ in the Sepulchre* by Mantegna, pitiless in its utter perfection. I confess that for a boy of my age they were dire things to look upon. And so the picture that now attracted my gaze struck me as all the more engaging. It was a charming face of a beautiful oval, with speaking, violet eyes, and it was poised upon shapely, girlish shoulders.

"How beautiful she is!" I exclaimed.

"Don't you recognize her? . . . It is Gérard's *Psyché*. The picture was exhibited at the Salon in 1796. It is now in the Louvre. It is the artist's masterpiece. But this study is much finer than the

corresponding part in the picture itself. How happy was this first inspiration, and how different from its ultimate realization! The head of *Psyché* in the finished picture is certainly a piece of fine and skilful draughtsmanship, but there is a coldness about it: it is too smooth, too polished, too chill. In the sketch the workmanship is freer, the style less trammelled. There is more feeling in it, a gentle flame, a coolness of the flesh, a tenderness which is lacking in the big picture at the Louvre. It is also true, a piece of nature caught on the wing and perpetuated, a piece of life. The painter was inspired by his model."

"But, Monsieur," I exclaimed, "the model could never have been so beautiful as that."

"She was indeed. Gérard was a great portrait painter, and it is in his portraits that we should look for his best work. And what you see here, my friend, is in fact a portrait, not entirely finished, but brought to such a point that it would lose by being further worked upon. I can assure you that it is a very excellent likeness of the model, and does not flatter her. Know, my son, that flattery, which is always an offence, is an outrage where beauty is concerned. The model who posed for this *Psyché* was long celebrated in the studios. Her name was Céline. You will find Céline in a great many portraits. She posed for David, but he was rough, and she quarrelled with him. Céline was high-spirited and very ill-tempered. She posed for Guerin, Giro-

det, the Baron Regnault, and subsequently for Hersent. She and Marguerite de Prud'hon were the two finest models of the day. Marguerite simply breathed voluptuousness. Céline was more slender, more dainty, more elegant. Her hair was richer and more abundant, her complexion more striking. In 1815 Céline, though past the first flush of youth, still enjoyed such a reputation among painters that the Czar Alexander, when he was in Paris, asked to see her, and gave her a bundle of notes on the Bank of St. Petersburg for curl papers. It is said that the Duchesse d'Angoulême was curious to see Céline, and made her a present. I met her one day in Monsieur de Forbine's studio; she was still pretty but very full blown. That was forty years ago. She must be a very old woman now if she is still alive."

I left M. Dubois' abode full of visions of times strangely mingled in my imagination and haunted by the shade of Céline. For days and days she blotted out the world from me—I saw but her. I was mad; above all, I was a fool.

CHAPTER XVIII

IL N'EST SI BELLE ROSE . . .



SAW Fontanet and Mouron in the Luxembourg Gardens and told them all about M. Dubois, Gérard, and *Psyché et l'Amour*. They were quite unimpressed. Fontanet, who had entered his name at the Law School, thought only of the declining Berryer who was to live again in him. Mouron never turned aside his beautiful liquid gaze from the Phœnician alphabet which he had just discovered. So I went up to Velleda's statue and told her all about Céline's beauty. White and pensive she stood in those days in the labyrinth where the bees hummed among the flowering clover. In the beautiful garden the plane trees murmured a soft and sighing undertone, the air was heavy with the luring perfume of jasmine and all bespoke the fleeting hours, the frailty of earthly things.

Shortly after that I went to see Céline at the Louvre. I found her in the Imperial Hall where everything—women in red shawls, wounded cuirassiers, plague-stricken folk in hospital, armies in con-

flict, the exile returning to his ruined hearth, divine Justice chastising crime, Leonidas, the Sabines, gods and heroes, all contribute to the glorification of Napoleon and his age. Amid the throng, amid all this glory, I found her and lovely she still was, though her eyes had lost their mysterious hue. They were flowers of paradise no more. Her face was a longer oval and therefore less attractive. Her neck was not so flexible and recalled no more the soft plumage of Venus' doves and the goddess of Love herself. And I said to myself that the first Céline, the true Céline, was the more adorable.

Taking my leave of this other Céline, I went into the square salon where, in front of every well-known picture, an artist sat perched on a stool. Many of those artists were women. One had fair curls, a dazzling complexion and an ugly mouth which, when any visitor approached, she would carefully conceal, putting her hand before it in an attitude of meditation. Half-hidden in the shadow of this muse, I recognized my friend and neighbour M. Ménage, who was executing his twentieth copy of Raphael's *Belle Jardinière*.

I doubt whether, as my godfather used to aver, he had ever drunk blazing punch out of a dead man's skull; but in his young days he had dreamed of fortune and glory. He had believed that his *Edwige* and his *Col de Cygne* would attract crowds of enchanted beholders. He was a truculent fellow in those days, a Romantic. But his Romanticism

was prompted much more by that imitative spirit which is common to all men than by his own temperament, which was of the sound commonsense order.

He could not endure David and his school. The mere name of Girodet would send him into transports of rage. Raphael and Ingres were his two *bêtes noires*. Apart from this he had broad tastes and an open mind.

"We must not run away with the idea," said he, "that there is only one right way of drawing and painting. All ways are right when they produce the desired effect."

He also used to say: "Before judging a picture, find out what the painter wanted to do and don't condemn him on account of the things he had to sacrifice, in order to bring out the idea that was in his mind. Genius consists in being courageous enough to make the necessary sacrifices be they never so great."

Of all his romantic panoply he now only retained his Rubens hat and his breeches à la Hussarde. And now, when his youth and his illusions were no more, he was galled by the narrowness of his circumstances and it grieved his soul that in order to gain a livelihood he was reduced to making indifferent copies for a pittance. Nevertheless there was still something of that happy-go-lucky quality about him which the practice of art gives to the least successful of its votaries.

Smiling his little bitter smile, he turned to me and said:

"Well, mon petit Nozière, isn't your mother going to let me paint her portrait? Try to get her to make up her mind."

He continued to paint for a few moments in silence. Then pointing with the end of his brush at the panel he was copying he said:

"That toad there (it was Raphael he designated thus) puts himself to infinite trouble to conceal his manner of working. Nowhere can you detect his touch, nowhere can you trace his hand. That's not painting. The thing is lacquered, glazed, enamelled; it's not painted. There is such a thing as smooth painting. Titian and Rubens himself very often paint smooth, but they've got a tone of their own. In that thing, there's nothing to give the key to the will, the intention of the artist. He's just a Chinaman and Ingres is another of 'em. And people think that fine. A parcel of nincompoops!"

As soon as I could get a chance I told M. Ménage that I had come to the Louvre to see Gérard's *Psyché* in order to compare the finished painting with a study some one had shown me. I spoke with the air of a connoisseur, which made M. Ménage smile.

"Céline, who posed for *Psyché*, is a well-known model," I continued, with some assurance.

"Quite likely," murmured M. Ménage with indifference.

"Was she very beautiful?"

"They say so, but I never knew her in her young days."

"She posed for Guerin, Girodet and, at the finish, for Hersent."

"For all the nice old gentlemen, eh? Poor little devil."

"Is she still alive?"

"Why, you know her. She lives in your house, right at the end of the passage where I have my studio."

"Céline?"

"Yes, Céline, Céline Cochelet."

"What's that you say? She who was so pretty . . . with her lovely hair, her violet eyes!"

"Ah, well. . . . *Il n'est si belle rose.* . . .

CHAPTER XIX

MONSIEUR DUBOIS, THE QUIZ



MONSIEUR DUBOIS took a delight in scandalizing my mother. One day he found her with a book in her hand. It was a work by Nicole which she would never lay aside, which she always pretended to be reading, and which she never read. But deeming it a good book, a moral book, she may perhaps have thought that she would absorb some of its salutary qualities by holding it between her fingers, as some people cure the colic by laying the prayer of Saint Catherine upon the affected region. This book brought the conversation on to the subject of morals which M. Dubois defined as the science of the laws of Nature, or of the things that are good or injurious in human society.

"The principles of that science," he remarked, "are always the same because Nature does not change. There are morals for animals and morals for vegetables, because for the former as for the latter there is a conformity and non-conformity with Nature, and consequently a good and an evil. It

is moral for wolves to eat sheep, for sheep to eat grass."

My mother would not admit that there were any morals except for human beings, and was quite put out.

M. Dubois rebuked her for being so conceited as to hold that animals and plants were not as capable as she was of good and evil. She told him to go and compose a moral treatise for wolves and a book of maxims for nettles.

Seeing how devout she was and how wrapt up in her religion, M. Dubois used to take a delight in reciting the words which the tender-hearted Zaire addresses to Fatima, her confidante, in the harem at Jerusalem:

"Je le vois trop; les soins qu'on prend de notre enfance
Forment nos sentiments, nos mœurs, notre créance!
J'eusse été près du Gange esclave des faux dieux,
Chrétienne dans Paris, musulmane en ces lieux."¹

Only he blamed Zaire for applying the epithet "false" to the gods of India just when she seemed to recognize that they were as true as any of the others.

One day during a cholera epidemic which carried off some people of our acquaintance, my father, my mother, and M. Danquin began to talk about death. What my parents said on the subject was

¹ I see it but too plainly; the cares by which we are surrounded in our childhood form our feelings, our habits, our beliefs. Had I been born by the Ganges I should have been the slave of the false gods of India, in Paris a Christian, and here a Mohammedan.

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orthodox; that is as much as I can say about it. My godfather's remarks indicated the hope which he entertained of being received in the next world by the good fellows' God whom Béranger had revealed to him, and in whom he reposed a brotherly and confident belief.

M. Dubois, who was present, was silent, and appeared indifferent to the discussion; but when it came to an end, he went up to my mother and said:

"Listen to what the profoundest of the Latin poets has to say on the subject of death. Unhappily I cannot reproduce the manner and harmony of his verse. But listen: 'Were we conscious,' he says, 'of the troubles of Rome in the centuries that preceded our birth, when the whole of Africa rose up and hurled itself against the Empire, when the shuddering air reverberated far and wide with the shock of war? Well then, when we cease to live, then also we shall be untroubled by whatsoever shall come to pass.'"

M. Dubois once asked Madame Nozière which, of all the days in History, was the most disastrous for the human race.

"It was," said he, "the day of the battle of Poitiers when, in the year 732, the science, the arts, and the civilization of the Arabs were beaten back by the barbarism of the Franks."

M. Dubois was in no sense a fanatic. He never dreamed of imposing his ideas upon other people. It would have sorted better with his inclination to

keep them for himself, as a kind of honorific distinction. But he loved to tease and chaff, and it was because he was fond of my mother that he singled her out as the object of his provoking humour. We only tease the people we love. I was unaware in those days that the flight of time works little change in our attitude of mind.

CHAPTER XX

THE ETHICS OF WAR



Y parents," said M. Danquin, "used to live in Lyons, and I myself was born there. I was quite a little boy when, one breezy morning, my father took me down to one of the quays where there was an enormous crowd of workpeople, bourgeois, and women. My father hoisted me up on his shoulder to see the Emperor, who was coming from Grenoble. He came across the Pont du Rhône on foot and alone. More than a hundred paces ahead of him rode a detachment of horse. The officers of his staff marched a long way in the rear. I could see his enormous head, his pale face. His grey overcoat was buttoned over his broad chest. He was without any sign of rank and unarmed, and he carried a hazel twig in his hand with the leaves still on it. As he drew near, all along the quays the cheers from a hundred thousand throats merged into one mighty shout. I shall never forget the scene."

M. Dubois, who was an older man than M. Danquin, also remembered something about Napoleon. He at once proceeded to relate it.

"I saw, I heard that extraordinary man in the decline of his fortunes, in 1812, on the morrow of the sombre victory of the Moskowa. Accompanied by a few of his generals, he was going over the battle-field strewn with the dead and dying, and appeared still under the influence of that torpor which had paralysed him all through the battle on the previous day. I had been slightly wounded, and I was looking for my kit when he came upon me unawares. At that very moment a colonel of the guard approached him and said:

"'Sire, it is behind this ravine that the enemy are in greatest numbers.'"

At these words the Emperor's countenance displayed a degree of indignation that it was impossible to restrain.

"What do you say, Monsieur?" he thundered in a terrible voice. "There are no enemies on a field of battle, there are only men."

I have pondered much on those words and on the tone in which they were uttered. I do not think that in Napoleon's case they betokened an excess of compassion, they indicated rather that he was anxious to put a curb on men's feelings and to subject them to military rule.

In 1855 the war in Italy brought about a conflict between France and Austria. The series of battles which made Lombardy run with blood filled my mother with grave alarm. Even when I was quite

a child she grew terrified at the thought of war, war that might one day rob her of her son.

It was, I remember, in the course of that year that M. Dubois spoke to her on the subject of war, and I here set down his exact words so far as I can remember them.

"In the days of my youth, one man alone, Napoleon, decided the question of peace and war. Unhappily for Europe he chose war in preference to civil administration, for which, nevertheless, he displayed great aptitude. But war gave him glory. Before him, and in all ages, war has been beloved of kings, and, like them, the men of the Revolution gave themselves up to it with furious passion. I am much afraid lest the financiers and the great manufacturers, who are gradually becoming the masters of Europe, may exhibit just as belligerent a spirit as did the kings and Napoleon. It is in their interests to provoke war, not merely because of the profit they derive from furnishing supplies, but from the increased business that victory would bring them. And people always believe that they are going to win. It would be a crime against patriotism to entertain a doubt of it. The issue of peace or war is generally decided by a very small number of men. It is surprising how easily they drag the masses along with them. The time-honoured tactics which they employ are always successful. In the forefront they put the outrages inflicted on the country by the foreigner, outrages that can only be washed out with

blood; whereas, considered in the light of true morality, the cruelties and deceptions inseparable from war, far from doing honour to the people who commit them, cover them with undying infamy. They urge that it is in the nation's interest to take up arms, whereas the country as a whole always emerges bankrupt from war. War only brings wealth to a handful of individuals. But there is no need for the war-mongers to do any speechifying at all: one only needs to beat a drum and wave a flag, and the masses will fly with enthusiasm to slaughter and death. The truth is that in every country the great mass of the people make war willingly—nay eagerly—because it relieves them from the horrible monotony of domestic life, assures them unstinted liquor and plenty of adventures. To get his pay, to see the world and to cover himself with glory, these are the things that make a man put his life in peril. Nay, the real truth of the matter is that mankind adores war. It procures them the greatest satisfaction they are able to find in this world, the satisfaction of killing. Doubtless they run the risk of being killed themselves, but men seldom think about dying when they are young, and the intoxication of murder makes them forget the risk. I have been to the wars, and you may believe me when I tell you that to strike an enemy and lay him low is, for nine men out of ten, an ecstasy of the senses compared with which the tenderest of lovers' embraces seem pale and insipid. The tasks of peace are long, monotonous, often irksome and unfraught

with glory for the majority of those who fulfil them. But the deeds one is called on to perform in war are short and sharp, and to be grasped by the dullest intelligence. Even in the leaders no great qualities of intellect are called for; in the case of the common soldier, none at all. Everybody and anybody can fight; it is the innate attribute of man."

It was ordained that never once should my mother see eye to eye with M. Dubois. She dreaded, like the most terrible of scourges, war "detested of mothers." Nevertheless it was not thus that she would have had it spoken of. She was almost disposed to take M. Danquin's view of it. He would have liked the sons of France to bring liberty into the world at the point of the bayonet, and inculcated in me that to die for one's country is the most glorious fate that can befall a man, and the most to be coveted.

My mother remained for a moment lost in thought. Then there stole into her mind the song she had been wont to sing over my cradle, and she hummed, almost inaudibly:

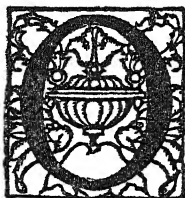
"Le voilà général,
Il court, il vole, il devient maréchal.
En attendant, sur mes genoux
Beau général, endormez-vous."¹

¹"Behold him now a general,
He runs, he flies, he becomes a marshal.

Meanwhile, here upon my lap
Fine general, go to sleep."

CHAPTER XXI

CONCERNING HAPPINESS



ONE morning Fontanet came to tell me that a certain wealthy woman of title, with whom he was on a very friendly footing, and who had a splendid house, at which she gave magnificent entertainments attended by the most beautiful women in Paris, had asked him to bring some dancing men to her parties, and that he had at once thought of me. I answered that I could not dance. That was true. Fontanet knew it, and it was because he wanted to have the pleasure of hearing me say so that he had given me the invitation.

A few days later Fontanet told me that he was taking riding lessons, and said that he was shortly going with some friends of his for a ride in the Bois. He suggested that I should hire a mount and come too. I was very fond of riding, but I hadn't the money, and I declined. Fontanet pretended to misunderstand the reason of my refusal, and said:

"You ought to come; the people at the riding

school would give you a very quiet horse, and you would be perfectly safe."

It was about this time that I saw at Verdier's, the well-known shop in the Boulevard des Capucines, a malacca cane with a lapis lazuli knob. I regarded it with feelings which, from their sweet and passionate nature, were unmistakably akin to love. Oh, but it was a beautiful stick! Alas, I was fated never to behold it save in the shop window. The Boulevard des Capucines was a very fashionable thoroughfare in those days, and Verdier's shop was much too grand for me to dream of going inside.

I was not at all a good-looking youth and, what was still more unfortunate, I lacked confidence. That seriously handicapped me with women. I was tremendously in love with the beautiful ones, that is to say the really feminine women, but their proximity threw me into such perturbation that all my faculties forsook me. The result was that I could only get on with the ugly ones, and them I could not endure. For I judged that a woman's cardinal sin was not to be good looking. I observed that many young men who did not come up to me got on better and were more popular in society than I. I was very cut up about it, but, even then, I had sense enough not to be unduly surprised.

It was thus that I learned that neither nature nor fortune had favoured me. My first impulse was to indulge in self-pity. I have always held that the one sensible thing in life is to seek for pleasure, and

if, as it began to appear, I was really ill-endowed to achieve success in the quest, I had, like the reed in La Fontaine's fable, very good reason to complain of nature. But I soon made a very important discovery: to wit, that it is not difficult to tell whether a man is happy or unhappy. Joy and sorrow are things a man is least prone to conceal, especially when he is young. Thus, after a rapid survey, I discovered that my friends, though more favoured than I in fortune and feature, were not a whit more happy. Nay, on looking more closely into the matter, I perceived that life brought me satisfactions that she denied to them. Of that, their dull and joyless talk, their unquiet, preoccupied air, gave me the proof. I was lively, they were not; my thoughts unfurled themselves free and light as the air, theirs floundered heavily to earth. Wherefrom I drew the conclusion that, if my defects were real, there was yet something in my nature or my environment that made up for the evil. Observing, to begin with, our differences in temperament, I noticed that my comrades' passions were violent, whilst mine were gentle; that they suffered from theirs, whilst I enjoyed mine. They were jealous, spiteful, and ambitious. I was indulgent and peace-loving; I did not know what ambition was. Let it not be supposed that I deemed myself their superior on that account. There are passions that mould great men, passions of a stuff whereof I could not boast; but that is not the question. I merely wish to show how it was I

came to recognize that my passions, so different from the majority of other people's, brought me peace of mind and a kind of happiness. It took me much longer to discover that my poverty, the drawbacks of which were very obvious, offered compensating advantages. I am speaking of a moderate degree of poverty, and not of that state of hardship and utter want which breaks the spirit of the bravest. Lack of money deprived me of a number of pleasant things, not always appreciated by those to whom they are accessible, things that appealed to my æsthetic desires. The longing for them is doubtless importunate and sometimes cruel. That I saw at once. But what I came to perceive, after prolonged observation, was that desire lends an added beauty to the things over which it hovers with its wings of fire. And I further perceived that the satisfaction of it, being usually disappointing, destroys the illusion, illusion wherein man's true happiness alone resides; it spells the death of desire which alone gives charm to life. All my yearnings were for beauty, and I realized that this love of the beautiful which few men feel but which carried me away, is a well-spring of pleasure and delight. These discoveries which I made in due course were of inestimable value to me. They made it clear to me that neither my nature nor my circumstances forbade me to aspire to happiness.

There was, however, one thing that my too tender years, my insufficient experience, and my shel-

tered life did not suffer me to behold, and that was the ways of Fortune and her works, Fortune and her wanton strokes, Fortune that triumphs over the strongest characters and, in a twinkling, makes or mars the happiness of men:

"O Thébains! Jusqu'au jour qui termine la vie
Ne regardons personne avec un œil d'envie.
Peut-on jamais prévoir les derniers coups du sort?
Ne proclamons heureux nul homme avant sa mort."¹

The first example I had of the vicissitudes of fortune was not particularly tragic. I will relate it, however, because of the profound impression it made upon me.

One day, in a café in the Rue Soufflot, I was sitting waiting for Fontanet, when I noticed at a neighbouring table Joseph Vernier, the young aeronaut whom, six years before, I had heard lecture at Grenelle to an enthusiastic audience. The lecturer on that occasion was supported by two members of the Institute who sat one on each side of him on the platform, and a lady in green presented him with a bouquet of flowers. He was as pale as Bonaparte, and I entertained a lively envy of the glory and the honour that were his. But now, Joseph Vernier was writing a letter on a café table and chewing a twopenny cigar. His linen was soiled, his packet

¹"O Thebans, till life's last day
Never let us look on anyone with the eye of envy.
Can one ever foresee the last blows of fate?
Call no man happy till he is dead."

was threadbare, his trousers frayed, his boots down at heel, his cheeks flushed, and his hand feverish. Could this be the young hero whom I had envied and longed to emulate? Alas! whither had vanished the two members of the Institute, the lady in green, the enthusiastic audience? The flowers and the plaudits, where were they? As soon as Fontanet appeared, I told him in a whisper who our neighbour was and the exploits which had won him distinction.

"Joseph Vernier! Oh, I know him," answered Fontanet in his cocksure way.

It was perfectly obvious to me that he did not know him even by name, and that this was the first time he had ever set eyes on him. However, no sooner had Joseph Vernier finished writing than Fontanet turned to him and inquired, with a bow, when he was going to make another ascent.

"I never go up now," answered the aeronaut in a weary tone. "I cannot raise the necessary funds to construct the apparatus. People do not understand the immense advantages offered by the design of my craft, and then they argue and find fault with the screw and say it is not strong enough. But of course it is necessary to preserve its lightness. I have been pushed aside. Tissandier and Nadar are all the go now. I have just finished another letter to the Government, but it won't be answered, any more than the previous ones."

He made a motion as though to brush aside the

cares that assailed him, bowed his head and said no more.

Incapable of discerning whether Joseph Vernier was endowed with the talents and temperament that command success, I saw in him an unhappy man betrayed by Fortune. The spectacle, which was a new one to me, filled my heart with sorrow and misgiving.

CHAPTER XXII

MY GODFATHER



THE Danquins lived in an old house in the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts which had been the home of Pierre de l'Estoile in the days of the League. They were comfortably off and had no children. These kind-hearted people, somewhere about the year 1858, took in the son and daughter of a brother of Madame Danquin who had fallen on evil days. The children, Marthe and Claudius Bondoïs, were born and brought up at Lyons. They were nice, dainty little things, with an expression of perpetual wonder in their faces. Madame Danquin, the most motherly of women, loved the Bondoïs children as well as though they had been the fruit of her womb. Nevertheless, they always kept close to one another, brother and sister, like a pair of exiled orphans. Madame Danquin was by nature of a merry disposition, but, being stout and infirm, her indefatigable energy had perforce to be expended within the limits of her home. To banish dullness from the house she used to gather round her all the young people,

both boys and girls, whom she could muster. Being M. Danquin's godson, I was often invited to dine and spend the evening there. M. Danquin devoted to the gastronomic arts all such hours as were not absorbed by his studies in palæontology. He carried in his head a complete gastronomical survey map of France, which lacked not pâtés from Chartres, Amiens, and Pithiviers, nor foies-gras from Strasbourg, nor sausages from Troyes, nor capons from Le Mans, nor collops from Tours, no, nor mutton reared on the salt marshes of le Contentin.

Like every well-to-do citizen of Paris in those days, he kept a good cellar and fostered his wines with skilful care. The worthy man did not think it beneath him to go himself and buy a melon when it was wanted, for he would have it that a woman was incapable of distinguishing a cantalupe that had arrived at the precise and fleeting moment of its luscious perfection from one that was yet green or already past maturity. And so the dinners in the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts were excellent. My father and mother were often invited, as were Mesdames Giray and Delarche and their daughters, both of them very pretty, Mademoiselle Guerrier who had studied at the Conservatoire, Dr. Renaudin gay and Mephistophelean, Madame Gobelin an elderly lady who painted miniatures—her manners were distinguished and she had been a pupil of Madame de Mirbel. Then there was her daughter Philippine Gobelin, thin, gawky, hair nondescript,

eyes small, nose long and irregular with a detached tip, oval or rather ovoid in shape, mouth big, complexion poor, chest flat, knees pointed. Her arms were not pretty, but by way of compensation they were inordinately long, and, for some obscure reason, inordinately bare. Whatever her motive, it appeared to have nothing to do with coquetry, for she used to say that nature, either through clumsiness or inadvertence, had made the fleshy part of her arm thinner than the wrist. Kind-hearted, laughter-loving, dreamy, quizzical, and affectionate, ingenious, she was so animated that she was a whole company of lanky maidens in herself, a wild rout of Gobelin damsels, some very plain, others almost pretty, but all of them loveable and entertaining to the last degree. Mademoiselle Gobelin lived and assisted her mother to live by painting children's portraits and saw with resignation her customers snatched from her, one after another, by the unclean hand of the photographer who lived on the roof in a sort of glass cage. Unimaginably industrious, she knew four or five languages, had read an infinite number of books, and was a very tolerable musician.

My godfather used to do the carving himself and duly distributed the portions among his guests, according to the time-honoured custom which in former days had always been observed in the best houses. The Prince de Talleyrand, reputed the most accomplished amphytrion of his day, followed this

usage. He carved the meats himself and selected the portion for each, graduating the compliments with which he accompanied the proffered morsels according to the social status of the guests. M. Amédée Pichot, the founder of the *Revue Britannique*, has told us how the Lord High Chancellor made it his custom when he sent down the beef to the princes and dukes at his table, to declare that he would regard it as a very great honour to see the offered portion accepted. Persons of lower rank, but of some esteem, he would beg to accept the beef, and lastly, when he came to the rank and file at the far end of the board, he would bang his knife on the table and shout out the interrogatory monosyllable—"beef?" Little did it occur to M. Danquin, a son of the Revolution, that he was carrying on the traditions of the great nobles of old when he thus performed the office of carver at his own table.

But it was appetite rather than rank which he considered when allotting the portions. He gave a double quantity to the sharp set, and never failed to pour a spoonful of red gravy on the plates of the delicate and the convalescent. Ungrudging and liberal to all, he reserved the choicest cuts for Mademoiselle Elise Guerrier, for whom he entertained an imperceptible yet decided preference.

And now, the better to show forth the lordly distinction of the manners employed by my godfather towards Mademoiselle Elise Guerrier, laureate of the Conservatoire, I will here transcribe the

words set down by M. de Courtin in Paris at the beginning of the eighteenth century in his *New Treatise on Etiquette as practised in France among the Upper Classes*.

"As the undercut of the sirloin is always the most tender, it is regarded as the choicest part of the joint. A loin of veal is usually carved in the middle, where there is most meat, and the kidneys are offered to the principal guest." M. Courtin adds that: "What epicures chiefly prize in a sucking pig is the crackling and the ears."

What I here say concerning the culinary compliments which my godfather was pleased to pay to Mademoiselle Elise Guerrier is set down without envy. Jealousy in such a case were out of place and would proceed from an ungrateful heart, for my godfather having a shrewd and well-founded suspicion that I had an inordinate passion for pastries, gave me enormous helpings of tart and custard. If, in speaking of these dinners so dear to my childhood, I am fain to recall the repasts served with such stately magnificence in the household of Cambacérès, say, or of the Prince de Talleyrand, if I also make mention, in this connexion, of the table of the Duc de Chevreuse where M. de Courtin made such rich additions to his gastronomic experience, it is from love of tradition and the desire to trace the thread of continuity in the swift succession of generations. In point of fact M. Danquin's table was of the most modest description and exemplified the wise modera-

tion that marked the bourgeois style of living at the end of the constitutional monarchy and the beginning of the Empire. Madame Danquin, good soul, ran her household on very modest lines. She kept a single maid of all work. The dinners were copious and lengthy.¹ Uncle Danquin, an old fellow of 89, sometimes sat down to table. When the dessert came on they used to ask him to sing. He would get on his legs and, in a voice that you could hardly hear, quaver out a drinking song of Desaugiers:

"Come, fill again . . ."

¹Nowadays the wealthy classes of democratic Europe display in their banqueting arrangements more ceremony and less delicacy than the aristocrats of the old régime. My godfather, too humble a citizen to imitate the rich people of his day who derived their manners and customs from the Revolution and the Empire, revealed, when one comes to think of it, a graciousness which was much more characteristic than one might at first suppose, of bygone days. Consider the following passage written after the emigration by a woman who was for a long time familiar with the usages of the Palais Royal, Madame de Genlis. It will be seen therefrom that, in some respects, the *ancienne noblesse* was less affected than the bourgeoisie of our day. Genlis v. 101: "When the guests were about to sit down to table, the master of the house did not rush up to the woman of highest rank or importance, lead her up to the top of the table, conduct her in triumph past all the other women and ceremoniously offer her a seat at his side. Nor did the other men press forward to offer their arm to the other ladies, a custom which, in those days, only obtained in provincial towns. First, all the women left the drawing-room together. Those who were nearest the door led the way. They exchanged little compliments among themselves, but they were very brief and progress was in no way hindered. Then the men followed in a body and as soon as all were in the dining-room they sat down where they pleased."

After dinner we all repaired to the salon, a big room fitted with cupboards filled with fossils, skeletons of fish and reptiles, imprints of crustaceans, of zoophytes, insects and plants, coprolite, jaws of enormous reptiles, mammoths' tusks. My godfather busied himself with palæontology with an ardour no one would ever have expected in such a tubby, jovial little man who wore such fine waistcoats and made his seals dance so merrily on his stomach-part.

One night, while the young folk were arranging a dance, he proudly displayed to Mademoiselle Gobelin and myself, the two intellectuals of the company, a cast of a human jaw which his friend Boucher de Perthes had just sent him from Abbeville. As he looked at this relic of the remote past his eyes beamed behind his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"They say that palæolithic man does not exist," suddenly broke out this placid little personage. "You can show them flint arrow-heads, pieces of ivory and schist on which he has traced the forms of animals but they still refuse to hear or see, and keep on saying: 'Palæolithic man does not exist.' Yes, gentlemen, I say he *does* exist and there he is!"

The gentlemen to whom these objurgations were addressed were the disciples of Cuvier, who were in the majority at the Institute. My poor godfather had suffered numerous insults at the hands of the official scientists and he was hurt, for he did not know that a man can only rise to fame on mountains

of opprobrium and that it augurs ill for the thinker and the man of action if he be not vilified, insulted and threatened on every side. He had not sufficiently observed that in every age the men who shed lustre on their country by their genius or their virtues are the victims of outrage, persecution, captivity, exile and, occasionally, death. These considerations entered not into his view of things.

"Palæolithic man exists," he said once more, "and there he is!"

And with a triumphant gesture he held aloft the jawbone that Boucher de Perthes had unearthed at Moulin-Quignon, thinking that he had only to show it in order to strike confusion into the hearts of his adversaries. For he had a simple soul and believed in the invincibility of truth, whereas only the lie is mighty and by its charm and diversity, by the distractions it offers, by its power to flatter and console, imposes its dominion over the minds of men.

M. Danquin examined and tapped the jawbone with his fingers.

"It exhibits the characteristics of a profoundly bestial type," said he, "but it is undoubtedly the jawbone of a man."

"Godfather, when did he live, that man?"

"Who can say? He lived two hundred thousand—three hundred thousand years ago—perhaps more. And even then the earth was very old."

M. Danquin, peering through his spectacles, sur-

veyed his array of cabinets and including them all in the widest possible sweep of his hand, he said:

"The earth . . . when that man lived, had already brought forth countless generations of plants and animals. Whole races of madrepores, molluscs, fishes, reptiles, amphibia, birds, marsupials, mammifers, had flourished and died upon her bosom. Aye, she was very old; the period of the great saurians had passed long ago. The mastodont, some of whose relics you see here, had disappeared."

Philippine Gobelin picked up the petrified extremity of a tusk, and with great depth of feeling recited those words out of Byron's *Cain* which call up the vision of those kingdoms which had perished utterly, swallowed up and lost in the abyss of death:

“ . . . And those enormous creatures,
Phantoms inferior in intelligence
(At least so seeming) to the things we have pass'd,
Resembling somewhat the wild habitants
Of the deep woods of earth, the hugest which
Roar nightly in the forest, but tenfold
In magnitude and terror; taller than
The cherub-guarded walls of Eden, with
Eyes flashing like the fiery swords which fence them,
And tusks projecting like the trees stripp'd of
Their bark and branches.

By myriads underneath its surface."

As these words fell upon my ears, these words of a poet now fallen into disrepute, but whose accents

in those days still had power to thrill the heart, I felt myself a prey to a delicious feeling of despair at the thought of those abysms of death which, after swallowing up countless generations of monstrous creatures, was ready to close over our flowers and over us. Human life seemed so fleeting, so brief as to render vain all desire, all hope and all endeavour and thus to set us free from all fear and deliver us from every ill.

Madame Danquin called out:

"Come along, Pierre, come and dance with Marthe."

Dr. Renaudin came and proffered his arm to Mademoiselle Gobelin, who quickly replaced the ivory fossil in its case, and said as she put on her gloves:

"Come, let us show our graces!"

CHAPTER XXIII

DIVAGATIONS



ONE day in my bedroom I fell to reading Virgil. I had loved him from my early school days, but now that my masters had ceased to explain him to me, I could understand him better. There was nothing now to mar and obscure his beauty any more. I read the Sixth Eclogue with wonder and delight. My dowdy little room faded from my sight, and behold, I was in the cave where the sleeping Silenus had let his garlands fall from his brows. In company with young Chromis and Mnasylos and Ægle, the fairest of the Naiads, I listened to the old man who, with his face besmeared with mulberry juice, sang so sweetly that the fauns and wild creatures frolicked in measured dance and the stately oaks nodded their tops to and fro in time to his music. He began to sing how, through the mighty void, had been brought together the elements of earth and air and sea, how the liquid orb of the world began to harden, leaving Nereus to be shut up in the sea, and by degrees to assume the forms of things. He told how the earth marvelled to see a new sun shining above it, and how

the rain descended from the clouds on high. Then it was woods first began to rise from the ground, and living things wandered thinly over the unfamiliar mountains. Then he told of the stones that Pyrrha cast behind her, of the golden reign of Saturn, of the birds of Caucasus, and the theft of Prometheus.

That day I followed Silenus no farther in his song; I mused with wonder and admiration on the firm structure of natural philosophy that thus lay half-concealed beneath the damask wings of poesy. When one has entered into these profound views of the origins of the earth and all that lives upon it, how could one have patience with the cosmogonies of the East and their barbarous fables? Virgil makes his Silenus speak in the language of Lucretius and the Alexandrine Greeks. And thus he comes to conceive an idea of the Earth's origin which tallies in unlooked-for fashion with the findings of modern science. It is now generally held that the sun, at a very high temperature, used to extend its immense sphere beyond the present orbit of Neptune and that, contracting as it cooled, it shed, from time to time into space, rings of its own substance which, breaking and contracting in their turn, formed the planets of its system. This is the accepted view of the formation of the earth which, at first fluid and diffused, slowly cooled and solidified. After the rain of molten metals which filled its fiery atmosphere, there fell from the cloud summits the waters

of life-giving rain. It was precisely this that old Silenus sang. The entire globe was at first covered with the waters of a warm and shallow sea. Then the continents arose and, at last, through the pure and limpid air, the sun's rays shone down. Grasses and giant ferns crowned the mountain tops. Animals came to life and, last of all their line, was born Man. Thus in the immemorial past was fulfilled that destiny which was to make the earth the perpetual abiding place of crime. The plants, sucking up with their roots the juices of the earth, drew nourishment therefrom. Plants, the only innocent things among living beings, formed their vital substance by distilling it with wondrous instinct from substances without life, or at least without organic life, for of nothing on the world can we say *that thing has no life*. Plant life existed, animals might therefore come into being.

"Rara per ignotos errant animalia montes."

The earliest animals, miserable creatures without vertebræ and without brain, lived by devouring the weeds of the forests. Thus animal life began with murder. Ah! I know you will tell me that no one ever speaks of a tree being put to death. We do not, but we should; for that tree was a living thing. Did it have feeling? People say not. They deny that it possessed the organs necessary to enable it to feel; they say that it was not an individual, that it had no consciousness of itself. Nevertheless this

flower-basket is the scene of hymeneal celebrations unsurpassed in splendour and fecundity. And if, as I do not believe, a tree is insensible to feeling, it is none the less a living thing, and to kill it is to destroy a life, no less than to kill an animal.

Meanwhile the animal species, developing from low to high, continued to grow in intelligence and strength. They acquired a brain and nerves that gave them consciousness of themselves and put them into communication with the outer world. Some drew nourishment from grasses, but the greater number devoured the flesh of animals belonging to species less swift or less powerful than their own. Hapless denizens of forest and fell, it was not enough that they should suffer hunger, disease and death, but all their lives they went in perpetual dread of attack, haunted by terrors which, brutish as they were, they pictured to themselves in hideous aspects. Last of the animals came Man, akin to them all and very closely akin to some of them. The terms by which we designate him to-day are the index of his origin; we call him human and mortal. What names could be better suited to the wild things which, like him, inhabit the earth and are the destined prey of death? Man is incomparably more intelligent than his brother animals; but his intelligence does not differ from theirs in kind. He is superior to them all, but without having within him aught that they also do not possess. And what brings him down to the level of all of them is that,

if he would live, he must eat of that which has had life. The law of murder weighs upon him as it weighs upon all the rest, and has made him a ferocious being. He is a devourer of flesh, and in order that he may not be ashamed to slay his brothers, he repudiates them. He boasts that he comes of a loftier origin; yet everything shows his kinship with the animals. He is born, like them; like them he nourishes himself; he reproduces his kind like them, and, finally, like them he dies. Even as they, he is subjected to the law of murder imposed upon all who inhabit the earth. Of his incomparable intelligence he makes use in order to subjugate the beasts necessary for his welfare, and although his stalls and byres are well stocked, yet the chase is his favourite occupation. It was ever the chief pastime of kings, and so it is to-day. He abandons himself to the work of killing with a mad joy which the other animals do not share with him. Like the wild beasts, which do not eat each other, he abstains from devouring the flesh of men; but he does what the other animals scarcely ever do, he kills his fellows, if not to eat them, at all events to wrest from them some coveted possession, to prevent them from enjoying their own, or merely for the pleasure of slaying. This is what is known as war, and men wage it with delight. Doubtless they would never dream of committing so extravagant a crime had they not been prepared for it by the necessity of killing animals in order to live. So it is written:

from the origin of life down to the present time, murder is the order of the day in the world, and the world will obey that order until life is no more. "Kill to live" is its immutable law.

I fell to musing upon this inexorable obligation from which none of us can shake himself free. The sun had set. I opened my window and watched the earliest stars grow bright, and I bethought myself with horror that the fate of this world, far from being unique in its terrible nature, was perhaps the fate of myriads upon myriads of other worlds, and that, in the infinities of space, wherever living beings existed, they were, perhaps, bound by the same laws that governed us. Are those worlds inhabited? The only planets which we see, or ever shall see, are those of our own system. They are our sisters and, like us, daughters of the sun. But they were not born at the same time as our planet, nor are they placed at an equal distance from the star that gives us life. Some are perhaps too young and others too old to produce life. Some are enveloped by a heavy atmosphere that seems to us to be unbreathable; some again there are whose air is too rarefied to be breathed by beings like ourselves. Those which we see over against the sun occupy cold and gloomy regions. Nevertheless we cannot say that these stars have never borne, do not bear or never will bear, living beings on their surface. We are too imperfectly acquainted with the conditions in which life may be produced to say that.

Pray God that these sisters of the earth give life to beings less wretched than ourselves. But does every sun which we behold, like a point of fire in the infinite distance of the ethereal fields, also lead its cortège of planets, and are those planets inhabited? We believe them to be so, because we know that the suns are all composed of virtually the same matter, and we judge of those far-off stars by the one which gives light to us.

If we judge calmly and sanely of all this, if, consisting of the same substance as our own, all these worlds are, were or will be inhabited, and if those inhabitants are subject to the same laws as the world on which we live, then is the evil unsurpassable, it embraces infinity, and all the wise man can do is to escape from life or to laugh at so droll an adventure.

"Rara per ignotos errant animalia montes."

Old Silenus, besmeared by the loveliest of the Naiads with the juice of the mulberry, whither hath thy song led me, the song which thou sangest to Mnasylos, to the youthful Ægle, to the Fauns and to the forest oaks? Sing again, sing of Pasiphæ, O godlike wassailer, and make me forget my sombre reveries.

CHAPTER XXIV

PHILIPPINE GOBELIN



DURING the Paris winter, when the dark, damp, and chilly streets heightened the welcome of warm and glowing rooms, merry were the evening hours we fled at Monsieur and Madame Danquin's in the old Rue Saint-André-des-Arts. Furnished with roomy cupboards full of minerals and fossils, the salon of Monsieur and Madame Danquin yet offered abundant space to young folk who loved the dance and who eddied round, in the presence of these silent witnesses of the immemorial past, as heedless of fleeting time and its unceasing changes as the midges that weave their mazy rounds on a summer's eve.

The guests that commonly came to this house belonged, for the most part, to modest families of savants and artists. The men came in lounge coats, the women in high-necked dresses. No show, no display, but plenty of gaiety and good fellowship.

Every Saturday the same company were to be found there. Marthe and Claudius Bondoïs, Edmée Girey and Madeleine Delarche, two cousins of the Danquins, the former tall, pale, with heavenward

gazing eyes, the latter fresh coloured, short, sturdy, full of merriment—Sacred and Profane Love. And they said that Sacred Love would have a fine marriage portion one of these days. Besides these, there were two or three nephews and nieces, and great-nephews and great-nieces of Madame Danquin's who, though childless herself, had as many children about her as the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe. Then there was my friend Fontanet, whom I had recently taken to the house and who wanted to rule the roost; and Dr. Renaudin, a young medical man who had just set up in the neighbourhood, and was getting a good practice together. He was a little, dark complexioned man. He was not more than thirty-five, but he struck me as old though I must allow that he was the maddest of the whole company. A bit of a Bohemian and something of a pedant with a mingled odour of dancing halls and the dissecting room about him, he was a man of remarkable insight and intelligence. His conversation, which was purposely downright, both interested and shocked me. I knew little and longed to know much of the mysteries of nature, but I was not innocent enough, by a long way, not to be shocked at brutally matter-of-fact revelations which spoilt my dreams and destroyed my illusions.

I could not tell whether I liked this little dark man with his blue cheeks, half savant, half buffoon, or whether I hated him. Twenty years later I should have hailed Renaudin as a boon companion,

and should have liked to dine with him in company with Anatole de Montaiglon. But at the time of which I am speaking, I was a little squeamish.

Elise Guerrier, who had recently carried off a prize for piano playing at the Conservatoire, was also a frequent guest at my good friends the Danquins. I do not know why my godfather liked Elise Guerrier better than all the young women that begarlanded his board and made a flower garden of his house. You would never have thought there was any affinity between this trim, modish, rather old-maidish bourgeois and the young artist with her large, handsome features, a little masculine and melancholy.

For me it was quite a different thing. A profound and, as it were, innate taste for classic art would have doubtless led me to recognize with pleasure in Elise Guerrier a type of beauty in which the characteristics of the two sexes were harmoniously blended. But that young person, even if she had evinced a shade of kindness towards me, would not easily have overcome my shyness. She filled my bosom with a sort of sacred terror, which was increased by the crushing indifference she displayed, or rather did not trouble to conceal, with regard to me.

She was, in order of time, the first of those beautiful mortals whom I mistook for goddesses.

The person with whom I was most successful in conquering my shyness at M. Danquin's, and whose conversation most perfectly responded to my craving

for knowledge and my need for gaiety, was Mademoiselle Philippine Gobelin. A capable housekeeper and a great reader, with a mind so extensive in its ambit as to compass the extremes of prudence and heedlessness; comic yet melancholy, she had read everything and remembered everything she had read: at one and the same moment she realized and forgot that she was plain of feature, and she would use all her out-of-the-way erudition in producing cosmogonical jests in infinite variety on the theme of her ovoid nose and the egg which marked its extremity, an egg as mystic and fecund as the egg of Orpheus or the egg of Osiris.

"One day," she used to tell me gravely, "I will sneeze and expel from it a host of tiny *genii*, some merry, some sad, who shall disperse themselves up and down the world and, finding a lodging in the brains of men, make them more mad and less stupid than they are at present."

She laughed, but she would willingly have bartered all her brains, all her wit, for Edmée Girey's face or Madeleine Delarche's figure.

I noticed this often, but particularly on one occasion, under circumstances which made me ponder and, for the first time, gave me a glimpse into the recesses of the feminine heart. It was one night at Monsieur Danquin's. Mademoiselle Gobelin had been very witty and amusing, and had been executing with much comic and delicate artistry some Spanish dance or other, I forget exactly what. I paid her a

sincere compliment. I told her that she had such an abundance of wit that she showed it not only in speaking, but in singing, in laughing, and in dancing. She heard me with a somewhat glum expression. I told her I was amazed at the liveliness of her intelligence, and continued for a long time to describe the intellectual gifts which people found in her. When I had finished she glanced at me disdainfully and turned away her head. Then Dr. Renaudin came up to her, and said:

"Mademoiselle, you are always pretty, but you are more than usually so, if that be possible, when you are dancing the fandango."

I thought this compliment rather a stupid one, but Philippine turned to Renaudin and looked at him with an expression glowing with such happiness and affection that it made the flatterer's words seem true, for, at that moment, the joy in her heart made her almost beautiful.

A great deal of dancing used to go on at my godfather's, and I can still remember the charming moisture that used to bedew the face of Marthe Bondoï after the waltz. Occasionally Dr. Renaudin would introduce into the most formal dances some dubious movements that he had learned during his studious youth in the dance halls of the Quartier Latin, but Madame Danquin was too unsophisticated to notice them. As for myself, I was a very poor dancer. Mademoiselle Gobelin, with whom I often danced because she was less in request than the

others, suffered a good deal from my clumsiness, and many a time she offered to give me lessons.

Much better than dancing, I liked the little social games and charades which were in great favour at my godfather's. And I remembered certain kisses given through the back of a chair to Edmée Girey and Madeleine Delarche, which, although they were permitted, were not devoid of sweetness. But the charades were what I used to like best of all. They contained in themselves every kind of stage performance, drama, comedy, pantomime, ballet, opera. For scenery, costumes and accessories, we commandeered the wardrobes, the furniture, the plates and dishes and the kitchen utensils of our host and hostess, and thus it befell that our plays were staged with considerable magnificence. It sometimes happened that Philippine and I were called on to provide the scenario, and, when this was the case, the charade, despite the precepts of Boileau, declined to the lowest level of merry buffoonery. Philippine Gobelin was gifted with a genius for extravaganza. Incomparable as a comedienne, she acted in a manner that out-burlesqued her most burlesque inventions.

Her chef-d'œuvre and mine (for I had a hand in it) was a charade in three parts whereof "the first" and "the whole" have unhappily escaped me, with the result that this dramatic work lingers on in my memory in the incomplete state in which most of the trilogies of the Greek stage have come down to us.

I grant that in this case the loss is not so important. At any rate I remember that the second part was "dance" and centred round King David dancing before the Ark, accompanying himself on the harp of prophecy. David was Mademoiselle Gobelin, who wore a long knitted beard of blue wool hitched on to her ears. This beard, combined with the nose that nature had bestowed on her, made up a countenance that certainly arrested the attention. Her headdress was a Kashmir turban surmounted by a copper saucepan wrapped in an Eastern mantle. For her lyre, she twanged the cane back of a gilt chair, and gravely executed a hieratic dance which showed off to the full the length of her arms, legs, and feet, and the points of her skinny knees and elbows. Behind her Elise Guerrier sang, accompanying herself on a skimmer. As for the Ark,

"Which all those towered citadels laid low
And backward made the River Jordan flow,"

'twas the work-table of Madame Danquin, who, seeing it tilted over in accordance with the sacred text, shrieked from the far end of the salon, "My work, my work," for in the Ark were the slippers which Madame Danquin was working for Monsieur Danquin.

But the great hit was brought off by Dr. Renaudin, who, by some mysterious means that no one could fathom, had rigged himself out in a costume that bore an unmistakable resemblance to a police-

man's uniform. He came on displaying a pair of enormous fists, and shouting, "Move on there! Move on!" put all Israel to flight.

M. Danquin went into fits of laughter that made his seals jingle on his stomach. "Bravo! bravo!" he shouted to Dr. Renaudin, whose satirical jest was intended to be a hit at the police for the rough treatment meted out by them to the citizens of Paris, which treatment was, it was popularly supposed, encouraged by the Emperor and his Government.

"Bravo!" cried my worthy godfather, who loathed the nephew as much as he worshipped the uncle.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LINE TO BAGHDAD



READ omnivorously and without method, and I soon perceived with ludicrous amazement that I knew nothing, that I had not even learned how to learn, and that my brilliant acquirements were but a thin veneer spread over the profundity of my ignorance. I became keenly alive to the disastrous effects of bifurcation and the loss I had sustained by not attending as I ought to have done to the geometry lessons which M. Mesange used to give me as he nodded and dozed to the strains of the violins. I came to observe, rather late in the day, that the exact sciences are the only things which enable us to form and equip our understanding and that our professors of literature made us into so many empty sound boxes, vain creatures, incapable of any serious undertaking. I expatiated on this theme to my father and, under his direction, and with the assistance of certain clever men to whom he commended me, I gained sufficient insight into mathematics, chemistry, and natural history, not, indeed, to acquire any knowledge of those subjects, but to put

myself in the way of acquiring it. I got my mental apparatus into working order, and its capacity sensibly increased. Unhappily my self-conceit increased at least as much. I became unbearable to my own people, being too shy to give myself airs abroad. Perceiving, thanks to that fatal perspicacity that was destined to be such a bane to me through life, that my father's reasoning was not always sound, I used to try to set him right, which was as foolish as it was impertinent.

The genuine attributes which now began to develop in my mind did not promise to bear any considerable fruit in practical life. I was still in the dark as to what career it would be possible for me to embrace. My mother and father gave me little help in the difficult task of selecting a profession, my mother because she thought me capable of success in all, my father because he thought me incapable of success in any.

Meanwhile Fontanet was learning to play the sedulous ape. He was fast becoming a man about town. He began to look down on the Danquins, and thought nothing of people who were not either rich or of noble birth. He obtained an invitation for Mouron, Maxime Denis and myself to a salon in the Faubourg St. Germain, celebrated in a quiet and circumspect way for its opposition to the Empire; a very exclusive salon. But the Church, lofty democrat that she was, who was supreme in this old-world dwelling, introduced there young people

of the lowlier classes in the hope of discovering among them and moulding there another Veuillot. Former peers of France used to foregather there, ex-deputies of the National Assembly, members of the Academy, *grands seigneurs* who, though naturally proud and distant, yet bore themselves with the gracious condescension that sits so appropriately on the defenders of lost causes. I took my tea standing, hat in hand, listening without a smile, despite Fontanet's nudges, to a celebrated old war-horse who, after fighting sixty years like Lusignan for the glory of God, all the eloquence and fire of youth still within him, was denouncing to the new generation the crimes of the Jacobins and the outrages of Bonaparte with an ardour that led him unwittingly to empty his tea into his hat. The women remained seated in one of the salons, in rows as if in a theatre. Generally, so far as I could judge, country-house life had given them a heightened complexion, a certain freedom of deportment and a somewhat loud voice. But never did I discover, in any other group of society, women with such simple manners and unaffected speech as these that bore the most illustrious names in France. Their society inspired me with profound respect. They did not displease me, far from it, but they made me displease myself and I did not go there again.

Fontanet also introduced me into two or three salons of business people where any man who could dance was sure of a welcome. Unfortunately I was

a very poor waltzer. And I knew it. Fontanet also was an indifferent dancer; but, as he himself was unaware of his defects in this respect, they passed virtually unnoticed. The house in which I acquitted myself with the least measure of ill-success and in which I therefore enjoyed myself most, was Airiau's, the engineer's. Airiau at that time had not yet made his name and his ambitions were only just beginning to kindle. He was just indulging in a little preliminary display of luxury in a very fine suite of apartments in the Place Vendôme. At the time of which I am speaking, the upper and wealthier classes in France went in for a perpetual round of enjoyment. Without being any great judge in such matters, I think I may say with truth that Monsieur and Madame Airiau gave magnificent dances. At any rate the first one I attended made a lasting impression on me.

In the blaze of light afforded by hundreds of candles and lustres which shone on their diamonds and pearls, reflected in those great Saint-Gobain mirrors, which even the staidest and sedatest of men looked on as things of wonder, surrounded with hot-house plants and masses of flowers in which Nature displayed as much artifice as Art itself, the women, beplumed and with hair gleaming and lustrous as the wings of a bird, all did their utmost to copy the Empress Eugénie. It was she they were fain to imitate in their bearing and mode of dress, and their low-necked gowns, and even in the graceful fall

of their shoulders. Balancing their enormous crinolines which seem comic to our present-day taste, but which then excited the deferential admiration always paid to the reigning fashion, and were denounced by fashionable preachers as monstrous adornments invented by the spirits of darkness, stirring the warm and heavily scented air with their ostrich fans, speaking in subdued tones, smiling softly and moving voluptuously, they charmed old and middle-aged men, and so intoxicated young people like us as to make us think we had been wafted into some land of enchantment.

Madame Airiau, whom I went to visit on her at-home day, had not the simple manners of the great ladies of whom I had caught a glimpse in those frigid old houses on the Faubourg St. Germain, but she made herself far more agreeable. Pale and slender, she would have passed admirably for the heroine of one of Octave Feuillet's novels. Women used to say what a pity it was she had lost her complexion. But she used to repair the ravages of time, and when I looked on her pretty face, I saw only a pair of violet blue eyes, a delicate nose and a wistful mouth. There was something arresting about the studied but quite genuine melancholy of her demeanour. Madame Airiau was not a happy woman. She had a literary turn of mind, and talked of Mireille with languishing, tear-dimmed eyes. She rather liked me, and I need not hesitate to mention it for, seeing how innocent and virtuous my awk-

wardness, my shyness, my embarrassment, and my lack of assurance made me appear, her regard for me was something in her favour.

Madame Airiau one day lent me the *Vita Nuova* which she much admired, and which, though I did not understand very much of it, filled me with delight. But people will never realize, where literature is concerned, how little admiration depends on understanding. We compared our impressions and found that we agreed. And thus it came to pass that Dante Alighieri drew us together with bonds that were wholly spiritual, as it was befitting that he should. And, as is becoming in polite society, I made the same progress in the husband's favour as I did in the wife's. I was invited to their intimate gatherings and even to bachelor dinner parties. There one would meet financiers, business men, engineers, an operatic tenor, a Turkish statesman or a Persian diplomat. Dinner over, we would adjourn to the smoking-room. With a golden key our host would open a little inlaid cabinet furnished with a number of shallow drawers from which he would produce cigars of divers shape and aroma, big and little, dark and light. These he would hand out with a nicely calculated prodigality, suiting the richness of the offering to wealth of the guest, but so adroitly that it was only observed by those to whom he offered the choicest Havanas. Having been given the cue by this example, I gradually

came to realize the meanness that underlay his magnificence.

Airiau was then pondering on that gigantic undertaking which is not completed even yet, but which is going to change the whole axis of civilization, the Baghdad Railway. He was regarded as a practical man, a man who aimed at getting things done. Nevertheless, he gave himself out as a humanitarian and a philanthropist. The old Saint-Simonians, by whom he had been brought up, were responsible for a sort of industrial idealism, a kind of economic mysticism which guided his ideas; a sort of poetic conception of the functions of banking which imparted the impress of generosity to his most mercantile and materialist conceptions, and would have invested the most unadulterated charlatanism with an apostolic unction.

Impressed, as he used to put it, by the movement which was bearing the nations towards unity, he considered industrialism and banking to be the two great beneficent forces which, by bringing the various peoples of the world into association with one another, would one day establish universal peace. But he was a Frenchman and a patriot. His idea of peace was of the Napoleonic order. What he meant and intended was that the union of the nations should be the exclusive achievement of France, and that France should preside in sovereign splendour over the united states of the world.

When, in imagination, he passed through Asia

Minor, crossed over the Taurus, the Amanus and the Euphrates and proceeded along by the banks of the Tigris, this little dark man filled me with admiration. He had the Napoleonic faculty of entering into the smallest details without losing his vision of the whole.

Being both ignorant and romantic he was fond, like Napoleon, of evoking in his progress names famous in history: Babylon, Nineveh, Alexander, the Sultan Haroun-al-Raschid. And it was wonderful to hear him talk, this little dark man, with his moustache waxed like a subaltern's, wonderful to hear him talk of awakening with the whistles of his locomotives the winged bulls of Sargon. Napoleonic he was too by his faith in his star, by an infectious optimism and by his profound belief in the maxim that we only finally lose a deal when we believe that we have lost it.

His voice rang with the accents of sublimity when he made his appeal to the various political parties, one and all: Legitimists, Orleanists, Imperialists, Republicans, and to each and every representative of intellectual activity, scientists, engineers, artists, captains of industry, bankers and poets, and summoned to this great feast of civilization all those who toiled in the workshop or laboured in the field.

One day when I happened to be calling upon her, Madame Airiau told me that in three months' time her husband was starting on a journey of exploration along the banks of the Tigris, and that nothing

would give him greater pleasure than to take me with him as his private secretary.

"This journey," she said, "would enlarge your mental outlook and ensure your future. Don't say anything to-day. Think it out and consult your people. Then let my husband know what you decide."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SORROW OF PHILIPPINE GOBELIN



THE hot July sun was spreading its napery of flame on river, quay, and garden. I entered the Louvre with the respectful familiarity of an habitué. In the ancient sculpture rooms, empty now of sightseers, the air was moist and cool.

As I looked on these remnants of an art that knows no rival, an art beside which all else is wretchedness and deformity, I was seized with enthusiasm and despair. Flinging myself on a seat in front of the Ludovisi Ares, I was consumed with a double longing to live and to die, with exquisite pain, with infinite sadness. My brain reeled with the intoxication of horror and beauty. I felt at one and the same time a wild, insensate desire to see and to know all, to plumb the depths of experience, to identify myself with all that is, and at the same time I longed to cease from thought, to relinquish this intellectual being, to swoon away into the void, to know no more.

At length I arose and resumed my wanderings through the galleries peopled with statues, among

those sculptures so natural and so deftly wrought, which express not alone the harmony of bodily forms but the music of the spheres and unveil to us all that we may aspire to know of the illimitable universe. Gradually, under the influence of an art which is informed with Beauty and Reason, my ideas grew clear and my thoughts serene. I made up my mind to look with untroubled eye upon Life and Death, which are but the two aspects of Nature, and which resemble each other even as figures of the two children Eros and Anteros which we may see graven on ancient sarcophagi. Next I betook myself to the Assyrian rooms. There, as I contemplated the winged bulls with human faces brought from the Palace of Sargon, I determined that I would set out with Airiau the engineer for those far-off lands whither I was drawn by the hope of making my fortune, by a whole-hearted curiosity, and by other and divers reasons, among which a desire to behold the tomb of Zobeidah was perhaps not the least urgent.

I think, though I am not sure, that the influence of Madame Airiau was what chiefly determined my resolution. It was she who had put me in the way of this enterprise. Her violet-blue eyes, her sedate loveliness, her exquisite head had wrought their charm on my youthful susceptibilities. She attracted me. By going away I should be departing from her, for she was remaining behind in Paris; and I was sorry, because of her lovely eyes, which I

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should thus cease to behold. That is one of my idiosyncrasies.

My parents were uneasy about my going so long a journey, a journey so trying and so perilous. But seeing how overcrowded all the professions were, and not wishing to circumscribe my liberty of action, they raised no objection to my entering upon what they regarded as a daring enterprise. My mother smiled at me when I spoke to her of this journey, but her eyes were swollen with tears.

As the New Year drew near, the streets of Paris began to look like so many rows of gigantic boxes of bonbons, toys, candied fruits, trinkets and leather goods, which the mists and hoar frosts enveloped like cotton-wool.

I went to say good-bye to my poor old godfather, whom I had much neglected for a year past. I found him sitting in his easy chair, looking very dwindled, his head about as big as one's fist, his legs much swollen. He was looking very dispirited, which was most unusual for him. The heart trouble which was destined to bring him to his grave, had got a firm hold on him.

"They don't believe in palæolithic man," he said, waving about a palæontological review. And he laughed a dismal laugh that shook the seals on his poor shrunken stomach.

Madame Danquin, quite helpless in her chair on the opposite side of the chimney-piece, a crutch on either side of her, retained all her constitutional

gaiety. She talked to me about all the young people she was interested in. The Bondoïs children, Edmée Girey, Elise Guerrier, who, she complained, never came to see her now. She told me a great piece of news. Madeleine Delarche was going to marry Dr. Renaudin, who was perhaps a little old for her, and without any private income, but a man with a big future before him.

"Madeleine," she said, "is pretty and distinguished looking. You used to call her Sacred Love because of her dreamy eyes and her slender figure. She will have a very handsome dowry."

Madame Danquin reflected a moment, and then went on in a decided tone:

"We can't agree, my husband and I, about a wedding present for Madeleine. My husband wants to give her a silver coffee service. But I think that a pair of candelabras would look very well in a doctor's drawing-room. The patients must be impressed, you know. Madame Delarche had other ideas for her daughter, but as she said so sensibly: 'The children must marry to please themselves, and not their parents.'"

I kissed them both.

"Pierre," said my poor godfather with something of his old fire, "if you find any prehistoric stuff on the banks of the Euphrates, don't forget me."

A few days after the New Year's holidays I went to say good-bye to the Gobelin ladies, who lived on the top floor of a high house in the Rue du Bac,

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underneath a blue glass cage which a photographer occupied on the roof. Warehouses with stores of tea, China vases, and Oriental stuffs perfumed all the downstairs part. On each floor, brass plates screwed on to the doors indicated the arts and crafts that were practised behind them. On the first, there was "Mademoiselle Eugénie, Dressmaker," on the second, "Héricourt, Dental Surgeon," on the third "Madame Hubert, Corsets," while on the fourth a card, nailed on at each corner, bore the legend "*The Child of Mary*, a weekly review." The Gobelins lived on the floor above that. I found Philippine tall and lanky as usual with her nondescript hair, little eyes and big mouth, looking all sad and woe-begone. Her mother, who was quite white, with faded eyes, her tissue-paper cheeks all covered with wrinkles, might have been any age. The two women were colouring children's photographs. I announced my departure. Madame Gobelin said that the Danquins had already told her about it. Philippine compressed her lips and said nothing. It seemed to me she was hurt because I had not told her first, and I was grateful to her for the reproach which I thought I read in her eyes.

I tried to remove this impression by displaying interest in her affairs. I asked her whether she intended to send a set of miniatures to the Salon, and promised, when I got to Baghdad, to send her some of those Persian water-colours she was so fond of.

Then she livened up and bedizened her melancholy with a sort of meretricious gaiety.

Her mother drew my attention to a handsome azalea that stood on the piano.

"Look," she said, "at what that kind soul, M. Danquin, who does not worry about anniversaries as a rule, has sent her for her birthday.

"Philippine was born on the 20th January," she added, glancing at her daughter with a look of solicitude, "and it wasn't so many years ago that we cannot still celebrate the occasion."

"Yes," said Philippine, "I was born on the 20th January under the unlucky sign of Aquarius." Then mimicking the tone and manner of a fortune-teller, she went on: "People born under this star always go out without their umbrella when it is going to rain. Whenever they go out in a new hat and some one is watering flowers on a window-sill they, and not the flowers, get the water. And if it happens to be windy, they get the flower-pot as well."

"Great stupid," said Madame Gobelin with a sigh.

Philippine went on a little in the same vein, but it was plain she would have liked to cry. I supposed that it was my approaching departure that made her feel a grief she could not dissemble, and I was forced to the conclusion that she loved me. I had never observed it before. Indeed I had always thought that she made no distinction between me and the many other good friends of hers with whom she was on terms of kindly familiarity. Sudden as it was, my

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discovery caused me no astonishment. Then and there it struck me as likely, natural, and in the usual order of things that she should be in love with me. In my view, Philippine's keen intelligence, her exquisite taste, her philosophy were bound to lead her in that direction. And because I deemed her in love with me, she seemed, if not prettier, at all events more agreeable. As the conversation flagged, I imagined that when the time came to say farewell she would whisper in my ear, "Please do not go," and that I should answer, "Very well, Philippine, I will not," and that when I saw her face radiant with delight my cup of happiness would be full. And who knows? Perchance happiness would impart beauty to the good-hearted wench. "She is changeable," thought I.

I rose to take my leave. Seeing that the fire was nearly out, Philippine ran swearing and grumbling to revive it. She had the scuttle in one hand and the poker in the other, when I said good-bye.

"I do envy you," she said, "going off to see all those wonderful places. I would travel too if I only could. Adieu, Monsieur Pierre."

As I was going downstairs I heard her exclaim as she rattled the poker:

"This beast of a stove!"

I went down very slowly, and when I was passing the door of *The Child of Mary*, I said to myself: "She didn't say much; she didn't give any hint. Of course her mother was there, and then her

discretion, her delicacy, ah yes!" All the same, I could not very well go up again and say "I am not going."

At this point in my descent I found myself confronting a stout lady who was going to consult Madame Hubert, the corsetière.

"She interests me, I like her, I respect her, I have a sort of admiration for her, but I do not love her and I never shall. I could never dream of marrying her. I cannot sacrifice my life for her."

At this stage in my reflections, my eyes lighted on the brass plate of Héricourt, the dentist. This gave me a painful impression and augmented the rapidity of my descent. A pleasant odour of iris titillated my nostrils on Mademoiselle Eugénie's landing. There I lingered a moment and mused as follows:

"No, I am not going to let this young girl suffer on my account; I am not going to let her fall ill and perhaps die. I will go and see her again tomorrow. I will try to catch her alone, and I will get her to reveal her feelings, or rather I myself will divine them. I will say 'I am not going.' I shall have saved her, and that will make me very fond of her."

I was enjoying a foretaste of the sweets of self-sacrifice when, on the next landing, I encountered Mademoiselle Elise Guerrier, looking more strange than ever, her cheeks mottled with the cold wind. She was more of an immortal goddess and tameless

SORROW OF PHILIPPINE GOBELIN²⁵¹

animal than a woman. How remote and how mysterious she seemed. As usual I stood gazing sheepishly at her and hadn't a word to say for myself.

"You've just come from the Gobelins'. How did you find Philippine?"

"Oh, fairly well."

"She didn't tell you anything then? You noticed nothing?"

"No . . ."

"What a lot of pluck she has in her."

"Yes," I stammered, "er—she has."

"She needs it all to enable her to bear this dreadful blow."

"Blow? What blow?"

"Why, Dr. Renaudin's engagement to that little Delarche fool."

"Oh, Dr. Renaudin's engagement."

"Poor Philippine. As a matter of fact Renaudin never really loved her, but he let her think he did. She was mad about him. He's marrying little Delarche for her money. She will make him miserable, but it will be the death of Philippine."

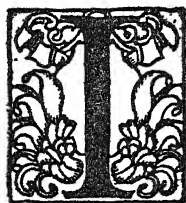
And Mademoiselle Guerrier broke into a gloomy laugh as she cursed the folly of her sex.

CHAPTER XXVII

MARIE BAGRATION

"Ἦρατο δ' οὐ μάλοις, οὐδὲ ῥόδῳ οὐδὲ κικυννοῖς . . .

ΘΕΟΚΡΙΤΟΥ Κύκλωψ



WAS nothing very much to look at, and I was a bad dancer. In conversation I was given to strange oscillations between grave and gay, without ever getting the knack of producing those ready-made ideas, those facile observations, which are most in popular favour. I was always at one extreme or the other, more stupid or more intelligent than the rest and, in either case, equally unbearable to the company. My fondness for women was far too excessive to be displayed, and it made me coy and timid in their society. All these were good reasons for my not being a social success. I did not overlook the fact that several people to whose houses I had been invited, did not renew the invitation. There was, however, one place in which I got on well enough, and that was the salon of Madame Airiau, the wife of the engineer whom I was to accompany on one of his journeys of exploration in Asia. In her handsome suite of apartments

in the Place Vendôme she received artists, men of science, men of affairs and women whose divers charms and endowments were heightened by the brilliance of their jewels and the majesty of their crinolines. I fancy that a great many Jews used to congregate there, but that did not excite the slightest adverse comment, so negligible a factor was anti-semitism in the France of those days. Nay more than that, the Jews were held in high esteem because, with such people as Fould and Pereira, they had filled the highest offices of state under the July government and in the early days of the Empire. At Madame Airiau's one met all manner of foreigners, Turks, Austrians, Germans, English, Spaniards, Italians, and no one found any fault. In the days of the Third Empire Paris was the hostelry of the world. Visitors from every quarter of the globe were treated with the most cordial magnificence there. There was no indication of that xenophobia, that mistrust and dislike of foreigners which darkened the latter days of the Third Republic, no sign of those hatreds and suspicions which, fifty years later, were increased and multiplied by victory, and which now will never die away. What pleased me best in Madame Airiau's salon was Madame Airiau herself, so pretty and, withal, so demure, so slender, so dainty, Madame Airiau who talked so well and who had been so kind to me. One evening, when I went there, I found among some habitués of the house, Turks for the most part, a lady whom I did

not know and to whom Madame Airiau introduced me, the Princess Marie Bagration. I scarcely dared look at her, a mist came before my eyes, and I could not utter a word. And all at once, I was conscious of being the most miserable of mortals. In a moment I had lost the use of my senses; all my faculties deserted me, my self-possession, my reason even, and all because of a woman, and a woman from whom I found myself more remote, more utterly cut off than from any other human creature. As a rule I was fairly quick at noticing what people had on, but now I only saw that she was dressed in white and wore a pearl necklace, and that she had bare arms; but even this I did not see distinctly. The soft radiance that enveloped her, veiled her from my sight. Little by little I perceived that she had rather dark auburn hair, eyes of black and gold, and an even complexion, that she was tall, of full figure and loosely built. Her voice fell on my ears like a caress, and gave me a delicious sense of pain. It was a strange voice, a little barbaric in tone, and it was a voice that sang. I do not know how long I stood thus bereft of the power of speech. The salon had filled up without my noticing it. I found myself standing beside a Monsieur Milsent, a man I rather liked, and with whom I was on confidential terms. I could not tell you what it was he began by talking about and how we got round to the subject of the Princess Bagration. The remainder of the conversation, however, I recall perfectly well.

When he learned that I had never heard of the Princess, he seemed surprised. He himself knew no more than what people in general said about her, and this he summed up as follows:

"She is a Russian Princess," he said, "and lives apart from her husband, who is always travelling. She spends her time in Paris with her mother, who is a chronic ether drinker. They are supposed to have money, but there is some doubt whether they belong to the true Bagration stock. The Princess is a sculptor, and there is a sort of mystery about her. How does she impress you?"

I was at a loss for an answer.

"Well," Monsieur Milsent continued, "now that you have been presented, go and see her. She is at home every day after five o'clock at her studio in the Rue Basse du Rempart. You meet some very interesting people there. Turgenev, Monsieur and Madame Viardot, Alexandre Max the pianist, and some peculiar women."

I made up my mind I would never go and see her; I swore I would not go. But I knew I should go all the time, and the Rue Basse du Rempart was already the goal whither I was tending.

When the Princess was taking tea, I approached quite near to her. I still saw her in a sort of nimbus, but with that definiteness of outline that was her chief characteristic. Her movements were sweeping and untrammelled, with more rhythm, more harmony about them than those of other women. But

there was something about her that frightened me; and that was the expression of indifference graven on her features, it was that her beautiful face seemed sealed like a tomb. If I had been asked at that time what feelings I entertained towards her, I believe I should have said it was hatred, but hatred unarmed, tranquil and beautiful as the object of it. She left at an early hour. After she had gone I had a sort of feeling that we were not separated and that, henceforth, wherever she was, she would be near me.

And now, in very truth, I beheld her more distinctly than I had been able to do in her presence. I recaptured every detail of her; her little forehead, which met the root of her nose in an almost perfectly straight line; I saw the discs of her pupils with their motes of molten gold in a heaven that was almost black; her curled nostrils with the proud beauty of wings, her half-parted lips that would draw close their crimson curves in the loveliest of lovely kisses, her white, firm neck, her breasts wide-parted on her broad bosom. Yes, I hated her because she had unwittingly stolen my life from me, and had left me nothing but a phantom in its place, for never for a moment did I cheat myself with the delusion that I could be aught to her. In those days I suffered from a timidity in the presence of women of which I was a long time curing myself; but with her it was not timidity that I felt, it was fright, dismay, a sacred terror.

"Au revoir, Monsieur," said Madame Airiau as I took my leave of her, "and come back again with a pleasanter expression on your face."

By that I knew that my malady was greater than I thought, that I was letting it be seen, and that I was wearing in public the signs of my aberration. I felt crestfallen. I felt still more so when, on entering my room which, though there was nothing very fine about it, I had used to love, I found that it disgusted me. All that was not of her was drab or distasteful, and I knew not where to harbour the phantom I had brought back with me.

Next morning the phantom was with me again.

I went to the Bibliothèque Nationale and asked for some books I wanted. I had to write a notice on Paolo Ucello. Incapable of reflection, powerless to regulate my understanding, I yet performed my task with credit, and thus realized that to achieve a piece of brain work for which one is naturally fitted, it is enough to apply oneself mechanically, and that, as often as not, it is mere craven laziness that makes us wait "for the spark from heaven to fall." It was now the 6th May, and I had fixed the 14th for my visit to the studio in the Rue Basse du Rempart. Meanwhile the thoughts that obsessed me grew daily more tranquil and more gracious. I felt that it would be a mistake to look again upon her who had left her ghost with me, nevertheless I did not go back upon my purpose. On the 14th May I dressed myself with unusual care and picked out my

very best tie. I had two scarf pins, one of which was an enamelled flower peeping out between two golden leaves, the other a silver coin with the head of Jupiter Ammon upon it. I chose the coin as being on a higher artistic plane. When I remembered how silent and how awkward I had been when I was presented to the Princess Bagration, I thought she might refuse to receive me. But what matter? Having nought to hope for, I had nought to fear.

The house was a low one, and a narrow staircase led up three flights to the studio. I entered. She received me as if she had always known me, and without getting up excused herself for not offering a hand that was covered with clay. She was wearing a grey overall which descended in straight folds to her feet. This overall came as a precious and surprising revelation at a period when women did not so much drape their figure as superimpose upon their natural form an edifice of millinery. One cannot imagine to-day how glorious a woman like Marie Bagration looked in that loose-fitting gown of coarse material, which seemed to bear her in its folds far away from the vulgarities of fashion to the blissful abode of the nymphs and the goddesses. Her flesh was not gilded now, as I had at first beheld it, by the light shed from candles and lamps; but the daylight fell from the ceiling with nothing to impede it, along the line of her brow and nose, and her whole face was bathed in a radiance of divine purity. She was just finishing a bust of M. Viardot. He was

an old man, and was sitting there in half a doze. The distance she stepped back to examine the effect of her work was inconsiderable and betokened some shortness of sight. It seemed to me that her workmanship had vigour and a certain degree of roughness about it. The studio was encumbered with casts and old ikons; Eastern stuffs were strewn carelessly about. M. Viardot, whom I had seen many times before, was not alone with her. Three men, one of them young, the two others elderly, were reclining on divans amid a heap of cushions. I did not know who they were at first, for the mistress of the house never introduced her guests. They sat smoking cigarettes and hardly spoke at all. I had been there about twenty minutes when Marie Bagration, turning to a tall young man with fair hair, said: "Cyrille, play me something."

He sat down at the piano and played with a wonderful display of technique. To my shame I did not know what it was he was playing. I looked at the music and read *Chopin, Scherzo*. And then I turned to look at the woman's movements, which to me were the loveliest music in the world.

When the sitting was over and Marie Bagration was covering up the bust with a sheet of damp canvas, M. Viardot roused himself a little from his torpor. He was a great art lover, and had published several books on the Spanish school that were very highly thought of. His wife had been the most charming singer of her day, and he congratulated

Cyrille Balachow on the fire and passion he had put into his playing. It was through him that I got to know the name of the young virtuoso. It was a new world that I was in, and everything there was strange to me. I took my leave without having spoken two words to Marie Bagration.

I did not know her, and perhaps I did not want to know her. Wiser than I shall appear to such as read this story, wiser than I knew myself, I had penetrated the secret of Eros; I had learned that pure love emancipates itself from all such things as sympathy, regard, affection. It lives upon desire and feeds upon illusions. By what path had I attained to this inaccessible truth? I had all that one may hope to win from love: a phantom. I wandered with my phantom beside me in the woods of Meudon and Saint Cloud. And I was happy.

I paid a visit to Madame Airiau, who welcomed me almost as affectionately as usual, but she made no allusion to Marie Bagration. M. Milsent, whom I found there, seized the opportunity, when we were unobserved, to inquire whether I went to the studio in the Rue Basse du Rempart. I said I did, but seldom.

"She doesn't know how to entertain," he said, "she isn't civilized."

My successive visits to the Rue Basse du Rempart were marked by no diversity. Always, as I crossed the threshold of the studio, I felt as though I were transported to another sphere. On one occasion I

found Marie Bagration alone, standing erect by her seat and caressing with her finger a little statue of a nude woman. I tried to talk to her about her art and, endeavouring to avoid commonplace encomiums, complimented her on her firmness of touch, a quality rare among women. She seemed not displeased at what I said, but she let the conversation languish. I thought to maintain it by talking of Greek art for which I entertained a passionate admiration. She did not follow me into those distant regions, and this time the conversation finally dropped. Suffering the artist to pursue her work in peace, I said no more. After twenty minutes' silence, she pointed to a paper-covered book that was lying on one of the divans, and asked me to read at the page she had marked. It was a volume belonging to a very ordinary edition of Plato translated into French by some professor or other. The page was marked at the following passage in the Symposium, which I proceeded to read aloud:

"Though many fine deeds are wrought in the world, only a few of them availed to redeem from the underworld those who had descended thither. But the deed wrought by Alcestis seemed so noble both to men and gods, that the latter, amazed at her courage, restored her to life. So true it is that a noble and generous love wins the esteem of the gods themselves.

"Not thus did they treat Orpheus the son of Œagrus. They sent him back from the underworld without granting him what he asked of them. Instead of restoring to him his

spouse whom he had come to seek, they only suffered him to see her phantom, because he had been lacking in courage, like the musician he was. Rather than imitate Alcestis and die for his love's sake, he had sought how he might go down alive into the realms of the dead. And so the gods were indignant with him and punished him for his cowardice by suffering him to perish at the hands of women."

She had listened to my reading with that impassiveness which she wore in all circumstances. But when I came to the last sentence, she interrupted me and made the following reflection:

"Plato knew then that women are more courageous than men. Why, therefore, in the *Symposium*, does he base his theory of love on the contrary idea?"

She made me go on reading. After another quarter of an hour a Russian lady who, I soon learned, was called Nathalie Scherer, came upon the scene. They kissed and appeared on very friendly terms. Nathalie's age may have been about thirty-five. She was splendidly built, superbly moulded; her ruddy face and prominent cheekbones imparted to her something of the bold comeliness of a faun.

For six months I frequented Marie Bragation's house without making the slightest progress in her affections, without even growing accustomed to her beauty, which was hidden from me by its very radiance. But this woman, who seemed so remote when I was at her side, grew familiar to me as soon as I quitted her presence. Whenever I could get away

and seek refuge in the woods about Versailles I took her with me. That I can say, for it is indeed the truth, and with our arms entwined about each other we wandered down secret paths, drunk with delight and pain.

One morning I read the following announcement in a paper:

"The Princess Marie Bagration died at midnight yesterday at her residence in the Rue Basse du Rempart."

The newspaper gave no details. I knew her too little to weep for her loss, but I was completely stunned. It was as though the foundations of the world had given way, as though the earth had yawned and swallowed up my Treasure, destroying what in my eyes summed up the beauty of the world.

I hurried away to M. Viardot's. I found him with Cyrille Balachow the pianist.

"This death?" I cried.

And the voice of Cyrille made echo:

"This death!"

"Marie Bagration," said Viardot, "committed suicide in a manner very unusual with women. They discovered her in the morning stretched on her bed dressed in white with her rope of pearls about her neck. Her right temple had been pierced by a bullet, and she was still grasping her revolver."

I inquired if they knew what had driven her to this end.

"Her mother is mad," said Viardot, "and her

father, General Bagration, committed suicide. There must certainly have been a determining motive, but I don't know what it was."

For a long time Cyrille toyed nervously with his fingers.

"The public," he said at length, "credit her with numerous love affairs; but the remarkable thing is that people who, like myself, have seen a great deal of her have never known her to have a lover. But that means nothing. Let us go and say good-bye to her."

Her studio was turned into a chapelle ardente. She was lying on a bed. A little round stain was visible on her temple. The flickering light of the tapers seemed to give life to her countenance. Her tragic pallor was the only thing that told of death. Her features still exhibited that impassivity which she had always displayed in life, perhaps because she held, with the ancients, that expression is the enemy of beauty. They had arrayed her in a white dress that reached to the throat. Her mother, seated beside her, haggard, dishevelled, was glancing about her like a witch. The friends came up in little groups, and then went slowly away.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

NEVER BE AN AUTHOR



OR about two years now M. Dubois' visits to our house had been growing rarer and rarer. It was very different from the old days when we saw him so often. He seemed no longer to find enjoyment there. And when he did come he soon took his departure, and never twitted my mother in the old familiar fashion on matters of faith and morals. Those utterances of which he had been wont to deliver himself in language of austere elegance were heard no more, and those speeches, so sustained in tone, and so rich in matter, which he had used to lavish on me as a child, he withheld from me now that I was of an age to appreciate them more thoroughly. Was it that he had grown weary of thought and speech? Was it that the burden of his many years was beginning to weigh heavily upon him? He showed no visible signs of it. He had not altered to the outward view, and he seemed immune from change. Perhaps it was that he no longer found in me the impressionable wax on which he had been accustomed

to imprint his thoughts, and that he was little inclined to impart his ideas to a great nincompoop who would insist on putting forward his own raw notions, and that not always with due modesty and becoming deference. However, one autumn afternoon we heard his ring, the brief, imperious summons that was habitual with him. M. Dubois was ushered in. His eyes were hidden by a pair of dark blue spectacles. He sat himself down in an easy chair, drew the skirts of his long bottle-green frock-coat about him, and addressed us with all his old magnificence of style. From his mouth there poured forth "words divine, even as in winter the snow aboundeth on the hill-tops."

"I imagine," said he, among other things worthy of remembrance, "I imagine, my friend, that you must be well acquainted with the idea of progress. Nowadays it is of universal acceptation, and we may regard it as remarkable that it should have attained such influence in an age which, by reason of its inferiority, is less calculated than any other to establish its truth. But religious sentiment, which has undergone such a decline in our day, has suffered the idea of stability which dogmatic creeds engender, to be supplanted by a belief in the indefinite progress of freedom. Such an idea flatters the vanity of mankind, and that is sufficient to make them believe it true. All ideas which enjoy universal acceptance are ideas which pander to man's vanity or respond to his aspirations, ideas that comfort and console;

it matters little whether they have any solid foundation in fact. Now let us look for a moment at this progress which your contemporaries prate so abundantly about. What are we to understand by the word? If we define it from the strictly grammatical point of view we may say that it connotes an increase in good or evil, so far as we are able to distinguish good from evil, and it is thus that we represent the march of the human race. But if (as people do nowadays, who know not how to reason or to speak) we say that it is the onward movement of the human race ceaselessly drawing nearer to the goal of perfection, we shall be stating something that is not in accordance with reality. No such movement is discernible in History, which reveals to us a succession of catastrophes, of advances, always and inevitably followed by retrogressions. The lot of primeval man, who was unacquainted with the arts, was no doubt wretched enough, but the industrial progress achieved by his successors brought in its train as much evil as good and multiplied the sufferings and miseries of our species at the same time as it increased its power and material well-being. Look at the most ancient peoples who have left behind any memorials of their genius, and compare them with ourselves. Do we build better than the Egyptians? In what respect are we superior to the Greeks? I do not wish to slur over their vices and defects. They were often unjust and cruel. They exhausted themselves in fratricidal wars. But what

of ourselves? . . . Are our philosophers more wise than theirs, and where can we behold, in France or Germany, a thinker more profound than Heraclitus of Ephesus? Are the statues that we carve, or the temples that we build, more beautiful or more serene than theirs? Who would be so bold as to contend that the modern world has produced a finer poem than the *Iliad*? We are great lovers of the theatre. Do our plays vie in beauty with a trilogy of Sophocles as enacted on the Athenian stage? And then again, of moral ideas. For the most exalted conceptions of death that mankind has ever entertained we must go back to the mysteries of Eleusis. And take the organizing and policing of the nations. A mighty effort was once attempted in this direction. It was when Augustus shut the gates of the Temple of Janus, and reared in Rome an altar to Peace, and when the far-flung majesty of the Pax Romana enfolded the world. But Rome perished. And ever since Rome fell the world has been delivered over to the barbarians who, even in our day, are so far removed from resuming the task of Cæsar and Augustus that they condemn the very idea lest it should prove an obstacle to balk them in the satisfaction of their lust for murder and pillage. And there is not a man among all these warring nations—not one, who has a thought for devising a means for ensuring the peace of the world, for the setting up of powerful amphyctyonies which, exercising dominion over the various states, would com-

pel them to keep to the paths of Right and Justice. If one citizen were to invoke the advent of this new order, which would be the salvation of humanity, he would be spurned by the worthies of his own and every other country for endeavouring to deprive the patriot of his dearest privilege, the privilege of enriching himself by murder. This unanimity among the nations of the earth in envy and hatred shows clearly enough the nature of the goal towards which they are sweeping.

"In science, no doubt, we have left the ancients far behind. That I readily allow. The sciences are built up by the accretions of successive generations. But more genius was needed to lay the foundations of scientific knowledge as did the Greeks, than to bring it to the astounding degree of perfection to which we have advanced to-day. But History proves that these accretions are not continuous. We know of periods when culture completely perished over vast portions of the earth. And even when, in happier times, successive generations brought their contributions to help build up the great edifice of Science, it would scarcely seem that the advancement of learning and the multiplying of inventions had any marked effect on man's moral nature. But what, in my view, is the most disheartening thing of all is that when a science has at length succeeded in establishing some new and certain piece of knowledge, when astronomy, for example, reveals to us the structure of the universe, educated men are unable to

bring themselves to reject as unworthy of belief whatever conflicts with this new idea of the universe thus authoritatively imposed upon them. No, they persist in their ancient outworn creeds, though they have been demonstrated to be false, and thus exhibit a crass, heartbreaking stupidity. Boast of your progress, Gentlemen, puff yourselves up with your ever-growing aptitude for perfection, laud yourselves to the skies, prance along blowing your own trumpets, until you are involved in the final and irremediable crash."

M. Dubois, leaving this subject, now drew from his pocket a little octavo book belonging to the pretty collection of the Greek poets published in the beginning of the nineteenth century by Boissonade. It was a volume of Euripides. He opened it at the Hippolytus and read the speech of the Nurse. He read it in French, either out of consideration for my mother, who was present, or more probably because he had a profound mistrust of the Greek that one learnt at the University during the Second Empire.

"The lives of men are utterly grievous and there is no truce to their sufferings. But if there be anything more precious than this life, a dark cloud wraps it round and hides it from our sight. And we madly love this life which shines on the earth because we have experience of none other, because we know not the things that come to pass in the underworld and because we are the dupes of fairy tales."

M. Dubois read the following passage a second time :

"We madly love this life, which shines upon the earth, because we have experience of none other, because we know not the things that come to pass in the underworld and because we are the dupes of fairy tales."

"Euripides," he went on to remark, "who was a profound philosopher, has here lent of his wisdom, perhaps a little too freely, to the Queen's old nurse. He is right when he says that men cling to this life, for all its ills; nor does he err in saying that the fairy tales that are spread abroad concerning the other world make men afraid. But I who have no fear of the underworld and do not suffer myself to be led astray by fairy tales, I am not so sure that I have not some lingering affection for this life, which shines so bright upon the earth, and in which I have not enjoyed, during more than three-quarters of a century, one single day of happiness. Mark that, my friend. Although the Fates have spared me those great evils which they have poured forth so abundantly on other mortals, though I have been afflicted with no painful illness, with none of those bereavements such as make men call down curses upon nature, I would not live over again a single day of my life. And yet, I tell you, I am not so sure that, contrary to all reason, I do not even now look for some benefit, some pleasure from this life whereof I have already exceeded the ordinary span.

In this I am a man. Every one loves life, and I am forced to admit, if not from personal experience, at all events from deduction, that this jade we call 'Life' has occasionally some good in it, though, so far, it has escaped my notice. It has good in it because, knowing no other life but this, we derive the idea of good therefrom, as well as the idea of evil. But the aptitude for happiness is not equal among all men. It is stronger, so it appears to me, among the mediocre than among the highly gifted and the imbecile. We should pray that our fellow men should love mediocrity of heart and mind, mediocrity of fortune, and every mediocrity there is."

Having sped this shaft with his habitual composure, M. Dubois drew from his pocket his great red snuff-taker's bandana and put it to his lips; then holding one corner of it between his teeth, he twisted it into a rope with both his hands, very much as Chateaubriand, in his old age, used to do at the Abbaye-au-Bois when he was asked to join in the praises bestowed on some youthful poet, if, that is, we may believe the testimony adduced by M. Herriot in his history of Madame Récamier. M. Dubois remained a long time in this attitude, then returned his handkerchief to his pocket and asked me what had happened to that publication about artists to which he understood I was contributing, and which he now never heard mentioned.

I told him the truth, which was that our "Com-

plete *Lives of the Painters*” had not met with the success we hoped it would achieve, and that it had been necessary to suspend publication at the very beginning. I added that I had lost a pleasant task of singular usefulness, and that now I was working in collaboration on a dictionary of antiquities; but that the work was more difficult and less remunerative.

“Work of that sort,” he answered, “writing notices concerning artists of ancient times and articles on archæological subjects is sound enough. It is not a job on which a man grows fat, but apart from that, it has no drawbacks for anyone who undertakes it, providing he be fitted for it. A good compilation does not compromise the man who acquits himself properly of the task, and it may even bring him some credit, without exposing him to any great dangers. It is far from being the same in a literary work on which the author impresses the hall-mark of his individuality, in which he draws attention to himself, reveals himself, unfolds himself, on which, in a word, he endeavours to set his seal, whether it be poetry, fiction, philosophy, or history. This is an adventure no man should attempt who has any regard for his independence and his peace of mind. To publish an original book is to incur the gravest of perils. Take my advice, my friend. Draw a veil over what is in your mind. Do not commit it to paper. If you publish a book too insignificant to excite remark or to rescue your

name from obscurity, which is probably what would happen—for talent is a rare thing—give thanks to the gods. You have escaped your evil chance and, at the most, you risk looking a fool in the eyes of your immediate circle. There's nothing terrible about that. But if by some extraordinary chance you have sufficient talent to get yourself talked about, to achieve some degree of celebrity (not to mention glory), if you make a name for yourself, then say good-bye to peace and quiet, good-bye to sweet repose, the most precious of all possessions. The curse of envy will never cease to yap at your heels; the countless army of lack-talents who throng the theatres and editorial offices will watch everything you do and call it a crime, they will overwhelm you with obloquy. They will spread abroad countless calumnies about you. And people will believe them. People don't always believe unpleasant statements because they don't always believe the truth. They always believe calumny, for it has more of a glow upon it. Newspapers, whose duty it is to enlighten the public, will give out that you raped your mother and murdered your father; they will say that you have no talent. Your books will doubtless win you a few friends, but they will be beyond your reach, scattered and dumb. They will do nothing and say nothing. They will also cause you great distress since it will be your most uninspired books that they will like best. And when you write something really daring and profound, something beyond

the reach of the general run of readers, they will not follow you. And the jealous will always be at hand to finish you off. Never be a writer."

It was the Monsieur Dubois of the old days. It was Monsieur Dubois come back again. He even teased my mother and explained to her the advantages of praying machines. When he took his leave, my mother, who was watching him as he crossed the court, said that he walked with a firmer step and a finer carriage than the young men of the present day.

Then she kissed me on the back of my neck, and whispered in my ear:

"Be a writer, my son; you have brains, and you will make the envious hold their tongues."

* * * * *

Next day we learnt from a messenger sent by Clorinde, the old housekeeper, that M. Dubois was dead. Twenty minutes after receiving the tidings I made my way into his rooms on the Rue Sainte-Anne—the rooms which I had seen but once before and which made so wonderful an impression on me. Clorinde was in the lobby telling the visitors that, as Monsieur did not rouse himself when she brought him his breakfast, she called out to him and touched him on the shoulder. Seeing that he did not move, she ran to fetch the doctor, who came and pronounced that he had been dead some hours.

She was weeping copiously and reeked of liquor.

I looked at him on his deathbed. His countenance, which in his lifetime had been of a deep red, now seemed as though it were carved in white marble. It appeared to belong to a robust man still in the prime of life. Above his head I noticed the beautiful nude figures of the Italian school which he had loved so well, and that "Céline" by Gérard which I had found so disturbing in my callow days.

Then I looked again upon the face of the dead. It was so beautiful that I grew afraid. Intellectually he was the greatest man I had ever known, the greatest I was ever destined to know throughout the course of my long life, and yet I have been friendly with people whose writings have made them famous. But the example of M. Dubois and of a few others who, like him, left no works behind them, has made me suspect that the highest human worth has often perished without leaving a trace. And need one be very surprised that the man who despises glory is greater than he who wins it by insincere speeches?

CHAPTER XXIX

THE THEATRE OF THE MUSES



THE journey to Baghdad was forever being put off.

It was at Madame Airiau's that I became acquainted with Victor Pellerin, the son of a rich manufacturer. Victor was passionately fond of theatricals. He was an immensely corpulent youth, always perspiring and always out of breath. His eyes seemed to be starting from his head, and his manner was at once choleric and familiar. How he managed it I don't know, but he contrived to get the use of a large hall at Bercy, which he turned into a theatre. It possessed a stage, scenery, corridors, and artists' dressing-rooms. It was known as the Theatre of the Muses, and, if the arts of Euterpe and Terpsichore were seldom practised there, the lessons of Thalia and Melpomene were followed with assiduity. Its name was therefore justified. The romantic spirit was still in the ascendant at this period, and the atmosphere of this theatre was much too classical to attract big crowds. That, however, was no great drawback in the case

of a theatre where the audience paid nothing to go in. I, at any rate, thought it a very attractive name. The actors were men of fashion, young amateurs, and friends of Victor Pellerin. The actresses were professionals from the Odéon or other Paris theatres, and included two pensionnaires of the Comédie Française. For a very insignificant remuneration, Pellerin managed to get hold of some quite tolerable actresses from whom he obtained some excellent work. This obese youth, who united in his person all the attributes of a first-rate theatrical manager, possessed the chief of them, to wit, stinginess, in a marked degree. It must be confessed that it was a very necessary quality, for his theatre, which brought him in nothing, cost him a very great deal. His allowance as an eldest son hardly enabled him to foot the bill. I wonder if he would have found in any other branch of art such valuable assistants at so low a cost. There was one thing in particular that made me go to the rehearsals at the Muses' Theatre. I have said that Victor Pellerin was an excellent theatrical manager. His repertory was very well chosen. As each piece had only to be played three times, he was under no necessity to pander to the popular taste: his sole desire was to please the connoisseur, and in that he met with tolerable success. When I got to know him, he had already put on, among other plays that had never been given elsewhere, Ben Jonson's *Alchemist*, the first version of *Faust* by Goethe, and Marivaux's

Les Sincères. Then he took it into his head to do *Lysistrata*, which was quite a new departure for those days. You must remember that I am speaking of a very long time ago. Knowing that I was passionately fond of Greek art and Greek literature, he thought I might be able to advise him as to the best way of introducing Aristophanes to Paris, and he asked me to attend the rehearsals, which took place of an evening. I went regularly, not because I thought I could be of the least use, but because I liked to be there. Goethe, who loved the theatre, used to say that, however middling a piece might be, and however poorly played, it was all the same a fine thing to see. I thought the same as that god-like man. And my pleasure began at the rehearsals when I saw how, from a chaos of words and actions, there emerged an orderly sequence of interesting events. It is well that men and women who, at bottom, are of a piece with all other men and all other women, and certainly no worse; who are selfish, greedy, envious, jealous and wishful for every possible ill to befall their fellows, should, nevertheless, work together for the good of all, and succeed in producing, by stubborn efforts, that happy unity which results from the proper subordination of the individual to the whole.

Lysistrata was Marie Neveux from the Odéon, out best and prettiest comédienne. She was a blonde, or at least her make-up was, and she had dark vel-

vety eyes. She was everything and everybody at the Muses' Theatre.

"I never make a favourite of any of these young women," said Victor Pellerin. "If I did, I should never be able to keep them in hand."

The speech was unworthy such an excellent theatrical manager. The truth was that he did make a favourite of Marie Neveux, and that he did have great difficulty in handling his little company. Hence his wrathful and disgruntled air, his ever-furrowed brow and goggle eyes. But whether he had shown favouritism or not, he would still have met with countless difficulties in a task which at all times produces them in infinite variety, and which he liked for that very reason and for the opportunities for favouritism it afforded. The comedians, his friends, all had their favourites too. The favourites of these upset the favourites of those, but they all settled down in the end. I also had my favourite from the very first day. Mine was Lampito, the Lacedæmonian girl, whose part was played by Jeanne Lefuel of the Odéon. It was not much of a part. Jeanne Lefuel asked me to add some gag and I gave ear to her request. O tragic consequence of a lover's weakness. I tampered with the text of Aristophanes! I may say in my own excuse that, if by a miracle Aristophanes had come in to hear his *Lysistrata*, he would never have recognized it, so drastic were the changes it underwent at Muses' Theatre. But wherefore seek an excuse other-

where than in the eyes of Jeanne Lefuel. Those eyes of hers were grey and yet not grey, or, rather, they were of a grey that no one had ever seen till then, and that no one will ever see again. It was a fairy grey, liquid, subtle, aerial, ethereal in which motes of light, scarce visible, floated in suspense, came to the surface, sank and reappeared once more. Jeanne Lefuel had not the freshness, nor the brilliant complexion, no, nor the insolent youthfulness of Marie Neveux; but she had a better figure which, with the majority of men, gave her no very great advantage, for it is the face that first attracts them and makes them accommodating about the rest. Who said that? Why, an authority on the subject, Casanova. He might have added that few people are capable of appreciating beauty of form. All I know is that I was very grateful to Jeanne Lefuel for having such a figure. Despite my gag, the part of Lampito was still an insignificant one. So Jeanne had plenty of time to waste, and she wasted it with me. We used to have long talks together. To do that we were obliged to be a long way away from the stage. For, if he heard the slightest sound in the theatre, Victor Pellerin would flare up into a terrific rage and bellow like a mad bull. Jeanne Lefuel had only to say a couple of words to put me in a happy mood. She was naturally witty and perhaps a little better read than our other comediennes. But it was not merely that which made me like her. In conversation as a gen-

eral rule the topic is of minor importance. Be the subject great or trivial, I welcome either, but it must be treated after my own taste, which is not very lofty. The smallest minds may often suit it, greater ones may just as often wound it terribly. As a general rule women do not accord with it. I rarely care for the conversation of women, but when I do, I care for it beyond expression. Now let me be quite frank. It annoys me to hear people speaking in a set, precise manner among themselves. That sort of thing ought to be left to lecturers. A speech, if you please, is a picture. It is a finished painting, a piece of detailed composition. A conversation is a series of sketches. Well, my taste in conversation is like my taste in drawing. In a sketch I like something free, rapid, incisive, something with a bite in it, something impulsive. I require that it should overshoot the mark, that it should exaggerate the truth so as to make it more apparent. And I want the same thing in a conversation. I think a conversation charming when it calls up to my vision a succession of quick, striking sketches. The conversation of society women rarely does that, but Jeanne Lefuel's did it all the time, easily and naturally. Listening to her was like turning over the pages of a Daumier album, and that at a period when a woman in a drawing-room would talk like page after page of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The subjects touched upon by Jeanne Lefuel were trifling, it is true, but the way she dashed them in

vastly increased their significance. She told for the most part of little green-room adventures, piquant incidents behind the scenes, rival lovers, rival actors, women mad with jealousy, actresses' friendships broken, renewed and broken again in a single evening, and yet slighter themes than that; how, for example, Pyrrhus slipped an egg into Andromache's hand on the stage, and how Hector's unhappy widow, frantically putting the egg now in one hand, now in the other, stretched out her suppliant arms to the king of Epirus, crying:

"Et vous prononcerez un arrêt si cruel."

This delightful art of bringing the slightest incidents before one with the vividness of a picture, was a natural gift with her, but it was improved and developed by her profession, which teaches one to see and to feel, and familiarizes one with the outward shapes and characteristics of things. Ah, what pleasant moments, thanks to her, did I spend in the bare and ill-lighted hall of the Muses' Theatre.

The rehearsals were usually over about midnight, when all sensible people went home to bed. Then we used to summon up the ghosts. All the women there were spiritualists. I am not so sure that Jeanne Lefuel, who brazenly turned the tables with her own hands, did not believe in ghosts herself. The table sometimes took a long time to get warm, but it tilted up in the end. How could it have gone on indefinitely resisting the pressure of so many

eager hands? They used to question the spirits by typtology, that is by arranging a code with them according to the number of raps on the table. For example, one rap meant *a*; two, *b*; three, *c*, etc. Or else a single rap would be *Yes*, a double rap, *No*. By this means the spirits would make answer to our questions. Some of the answers made nonsense, and they were not the least entertaining. When I expressed surprise at the stupidity of the spirits, our duenna, whose name was Thérèse Duflon, gave me a pretty commonsense answer:

"They are the spirits of the dead," said she, "and merely being dead doesn't give anyone brains."

Thus it was all in vain that we questioned a woman who had been a wool-carder at Amiens and had recently died, asking her to tell us what and where she was. The poor soul, who had never known very much about life, knew still less about death. And that was the case with most of the spirits who communicated with us through the medium of the table. The table had its own familiar spirits. There was one Charlot, a very foul-mouthed fellow, and a certain Gonzalve whom Mademoiselle Berger recognized as a lover who had once been dear to her and whom she had unfortunately lost. We took part with feelings of sympathy at these touching encounters between the living and the dead. But knocks produced by the leg of a table afforded a sorry medium for expressing a lover's passion, and Gonzalve became rather a bore. One of our

prettiest actresses, whose name was Rosemonde, had flung herself with great ardour and impatience into the study and practice of the black art ever since the day when she thought she had called forth the spirit of a little girl named Luce, who, when she was seven years old, played in a comedy at the Odéon and forthwith gave up the ghost, thus repeating the fate of the child Septentrion who danced twice in the theatre of Antipolis and found favour. *Biduo saltavit et placuit.* Rosemonde besieged Luce with questions about her brief life here on earth and about her present state. Luce scarcely spoke at all, and lingered but a little while. It was noted that she rapped much more lightly than the other spirits, and that her swift and transitory apparitions were in keeping with the characteristics of a child. Rosemonde, as a result of some inquiries, got into touch, by means of typtology, with one of Luce's aunts. And among the questions put by her to the deceased lady, was one concerning Luce's parentage. Not wholly satisfied with the aunt's replies, the inquisitive Rosemonde, who had got to know several departed members of little Luce's family, carried out a long and intricate inquiry without ever being able clearly to distinguish between the child's mother and grandmother. And her curiosity was no better satisfied than was that of the learned investigators who endeavoured to discover the parentage of little Menou in Molière's company of players

Despite the most brazen tricks, the grossest frauds, the most barefaced hoaxes, these women, some of whom decidedly had brains, firmly believed that the dead were present in that great hall where the light from three candles made the darkness visible, and where, like Ulysses among the Cimmerians, we called up the spirits of the dead, while all around us hung the cloudy draperies of the impalpable shadows. Sometimes, without any warning, these women would be seized with panic and flee in terror, shrieking and eddying about like great birds; now pursuing, now fleeing from one another, getting entangled in each other's skirts, falling down, crying out for their mothers, crossing themselves for fear. And then, five minutes later, they would all be seated round the curvetting table prattling, shouting, giggling and breaking into peals of mad merry laughter. And this would go on until two and half-past two in the morning.

It then fell to me to take Jeanne Lefuel back to her lodgings in the Rue d'Assas. That wasn't done in a jiffy. First of all I had to find a fiacre, a difficult and uncertain task, especially when it was wet. After a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, if my luck was in, I would manage to get hold of a growler with red blinds, driven by an old jarvey in a box-cloth coat, and drawn by a spavined apology for a horse. In such a turnout it took a good hour to get to the neighbourhood of the Luxembourg. I didn't grumble at that. We were alone

together, and the conversation took a more intimate turn. I spoke to her without reserve, with the most complete confidence and with that urgent longing to unburden my soul which always seized me in her company. As for her, she conversed about whatever was uppermost in her mind, without embarrassment, without a trace of constraint; yet she was a long way from saying all she had in her mind, and I felt that even in her most confidential moments she maintained silence about a large portion of her life, her thoughts and actions. She did so doubtless out of prudence; and also, I think, because she was detached, to an almost unimaginable degree, from the past and the future, and because there never was a woman who lived in the present so utterly as she did. It was to this happy disposition that she owed the peace that reigned in her heart. Regrets she knew not and with forebodings she was unacquainted. Hers was a soul as serene and unruffled as a calm sea.

We should in due course pull up at No. 18, Rue d'Assas. When there was something left still to say, I dismissed the fiacre and went up to the third floor, where Jeanne had her little flat. To arrive there you had to ring the bell, but to get them to open the big door "that was the labour, that was the toil," as Virgil says. After stubborn efforts, by dint of continual ringing, by banging and kicking at the door, you at last succeeded in rousing the porter. Sesame opened; and you were rewarded for

your pains. The little woman's room was not luxurious. An iron bedstead, a walnut chest of drawers and a wardrobe with a mirror made up the tale of furniture, but it was all as clean as a new pin, and tidy as it could be. Jeanne had a queer trick of adorning the doors of her lodgings with verses framed in a border of flowers painted in water colours. They had a grace of their own those verses, but they exhibited metrical defects that used to shock me. They would pass unnoticed nowadays. I am speaking of things that happened a long time ago, in another age.

One morning, when I went to see her, I found her busy with her sewing. Great round tortoiseshell spectacles queerly bestraddled her nose. She was surrounded with a quantity of little old boxes, little old needle cases that revealed the careful housewife. And this is the picture of her I best love to recall.

Just a year after our first meeting, Jeanne Lefuel had calmly forgotten me. I still remember her.

CHAPTER XXX

'TIS WELL TO BE BORN POOR



S the years went by, I often bethought me of the passage M. Dubois had quoted to me from Herodotus: "Know that poverty is the faithful friend of Greece. Virtue is of her company, virtue daughter of wisdom and good governance."

I give thanks to the gods for having decreed that I should be born poor. Poverty was a beneficent mother to me and showed me the true value of the things one needs in life, which, without her, I should have never known. Forbearing to lay upon me the burden of luxury she dedicated my days to the service of Art and Beauty. She preserved me from folly and kept me in good heart. Poverty is like the angel of Jacob: compelling those she loves to wrestle with her in the darkness, and when they come forth into the light, bruised though they be, the blood courses more swiftly in their veins, their loins are suppler, their arm more strong.

Having had but a meagre share in this world's goods, I have loved life for herself, I have loved her

unveiled, in that nakedness that is so potent to terrify and to charm.

Poverty vouchsafes to those she loves the only real boon there is in this life, the boon which imbues with loveliness and grace the beings and the things we care for, which sheds over the world its perfume and its charm, the boon of Desire.

"Bitterly sorrowful is the life of man, and there is no truce to our sufferings." So spake the nurse of Phædra, and the lament thus sighed from her bosom no one has gainsaid.

"Howbeit," the aged Cretan woman continues, "we love this life, since what cometh after is but darkness about which man have invented many fables."

Also we love life, dolorous life, because we are in love with Sorrow. And how should we not love Sorrow, seeing how she resembles Joy, and is sometimes mingled with her?

EPILOGUE



THESE reminiscences, which follow on the memories of *Little Pierre*, are true records of the main events of my boyhood, of certain personal types and customs. When I began to call them to mind, without sequence or any sort of order, in *My Friends' Book* and in *Pierre Nozière*, many of the people who had known me as a child, and whom I was portraying to the world, were still living. Hence the obligation I was under to change their names and the outward circumstances of their lives, lest I should give offence to their pride or their modesty. For such feelings are easily wounded in people whose happy lot it is to pass their days in obscurity. The mere sight of their names in print puts them in a turmoil. Praise and blame alike perturb them when they are publicly given to the world. My father and mother were still alive, and although I had nothing but praise to bestow on them, nothing but thanks to render them, yet, even so, it was necessary that this praise and this gratitude should be discreetly veiled.

But they have long been sleeping, side by side,

beneath a mossy stone, close to the wood that shadowed their peaceful old age. Yet even now, when the torrent of the ruining years has closed over my childhood and borne everything before it, I am still afraid lest I should do violence to my filial piety in one of those fibres which strike down so deeply into the past.

It behoved me then either to do as I have done, or to withhold the publication of these little vignettes altogether, while I lived, as is the ordinary practice of those who write their lives or portions of their lives. I will make so bold as to adorn my apology with a majestic figure of speech, and to say that nearly all memoirs are "*Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*"—memories from beyond the tomb. But I have not dedicated "*My childhood*" to posterity, nor for a moment entertained the idea that future generations could take any interest in these trivial matters. I think now that whatever we be, great or little, none of us will live any longer in posterity than the later writers of Latin antiquity, and that the New Europe will differ too utterly from the Europe that is now dissolving before our eyes to concern itself with our arts or our philosophy. Not being a prophet, I did not foresee the terrible and imminent ruin that was about to overwhelm our civilization when, at the age of thirty-seven, with half my life behind me, I transformed little Anatole into little Pierre. So far as I was concerned, I was not loth to change my name and circumstances—at

least on paper. It made it easier for me to talk about myself, to blame or praise myself, to bewail my lot, to smile or grumble at myself to the top of my bent. In Venice, in the olden days, when a person did not wish to be accosted by his friends, he attached a mask, about as big as the palm of his hand, to one of the buttons of his coat, and thus gave notice to the passers-by that he did not desire to be spoken to. Similarly, this borrowed name of mine was no disguise, but it signified my intention to preserve my incognito.

The expedient also had this additional advantage, it enabled me to conceal the shortcomings of my memory, which is a very bad one, and to fill up the gaps in my recollections by drawing upon my imagination. I have invented details to replace circumstances that had escaped me, but these inventions never had any other purpose than to reveal and illustrate a character. In short, I believe that no one ever lied with a greater regard for the truth. Jean Jacques somewhere in his *Confessions* has said something of the same sort, I fancy. I have said that my memory was a very bad one. That needs qualifying. The great majority of the images that entered there have been lost completely, but what little remains is very clear, and so my memory is a brilliant museum.

This manner of writing about my childhood offers a further advantage which, to my mind, is the most valuable of all: it is the interweaving, in never so

small a degree, of the fictitious with the real. I repeat I have lied but little in these tales, and never about essentials; but perhaps I have lied sufficiently to instruct and to please. Truth has never been looked upon unveiled. Fiction, fable, story, myth, such are the disguises beneath which man has ever loved and known her. I am inclined to think that without a small admixture of fiction *Little Pierre* would not have found much favour. And that would have been a pity, not for myself, for my desires are over, but for those into whose minds and hearts he has instilled tranquil thoughts and those temperate virtues which bring happiness in their train. Were it not for a little make-believe, he would lack the smile on his countenance.

However, I do not say that this disguise has no drawbacks. Whatever line we take, we are bound to find trouble somewhere. My confrère, Lucien Descaves, with his delicate insight and keen sense of reality, went through *Little Pierre* the other day, and showed me all that I had made my father lose by taking it into my head to make a doctor of him. I admit that he lost a bookshop thereby—no small deprivation in the eyes of a book-lover like Lucien Descaves. But what I know better than anybody is that my father had no affection for the bookshop of which I bereft him. He had not a grain of the business instinct in his composition, and it was much more in his line to read his books than to sell them. His cast of mind was wholly metaphysical, and the

outward and visible had no interest for him. He cared not a jot for the appearance of a book, and he loathed bibliophiles. It is no paradox to say that Dr. Nozière in his consulting-room bears a far more faithful resemblance to my father than did my father himself in his bookshop. The things I have taken from him were but accidentals, and in their place I have given him what was in essential accord with his nature. Still it is true that I made away with an old bookshop. I beg Lucien Descaves to forgive me, and to remember that I opened another one elsewhere for Jacques Tournebroche. Descaves, I fancy, has pointed out my gravest delinquency. I hope no one will find fault with me for transferring my godfather's dwelling from the Rue des Grands-Augustins just about a hundred paces away into the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts where Pierre de l'Estoile had his abode. There are many people who flourished when I was a child whose mode of life I have set down without alteration or disguise. Of several I have retained the real name, as, for example, M. Dubois, contenting myself in his case with suppressing a title which, by the way, he himself never used.

As I have said, I was tempted to follow Jean Jacques' example, and defy anyone to say that he was a better man than I. I hasten to add that I don't pride myself much on that account. I fancy that men in general are a good deal worse than they appear. They don't show themselves as they are. They hide themselves when they do things calculated

to excite hatred or contempt; they only come out into the open to perform actions that will earn them admiration or applause. I have seldom opened a door by accident without beholding something that filled me with pity, horror or disgust for my fellow men.

And this Truth, which I love so passionately—have I always been faithful to her? Just now I flattered myself that I had. On mature reflection, I would not swear to it. There is not much art in these stories; but perhaps a modicum has slipped in here and there. And art implies arrangement, dissimulation, deception.

It is a question whether human speech is perfectly fitted to express truth. It originated in the cries of animals, and it keeps the marks of its origin. It gives utterance to the feelings, the passions, the needs of man, to his joys and sorrows, his loves and hates. It is not adapted to express truth. Truth does not exist in the souls of wild beasts, nor does it in our own, and metaphysicians who have written treatises upon it are but purveyors of moonshine.

All I can claim is that I have acted in good faith. Again I say it: I love truth. I believe that man has need of it; but assuredly he has still greater need of the illusions that encourage and console and set no limit to his hopes and aspirations. Rob him of his illusions, and man would perish of very weariness and despair.

